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STORY OF DEMOCRACY

OF THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE

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FROM THE HOUSE OF MAGIC POT, THE WEEK, MANORAMA YEARBOOK, VANITHA & THE MALAYALA MANORAMA DAILY

The Story of Democracy

It was not easy to define the word 'democracy' until Abraham Lincoln's historic Gettysburg Address. On 19th November 1863, he concluded his epic speech with the stirring phrase, "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Lincoln's insightful words became the most popular phrase to describe the complex system of democracy. Even though mankind got an apt definition for democracy only in the 19th century, democracy as a system of governance originated in Ancient Athens.

We Indians can take pride that our country is the largest democracy in the world. This issue of Tell Me Why helps you to understand the thorny path along which the system of democracy has travelled to reach its present exalted state of grandeur.

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THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRACY

What is meant by democracy?

Democracy is a form of government, in which it is the people who decide who will rule them. Democracy was born in ancient Greece, in the city–state of Athens, during the 6th century BC.

In fact, the very word is of Greek origin, and it means 'rule by the people'. In a democracy, each individual adult in a country, city, or specific area, can vote for a candidate who will represent him in the government. This means that power is not concentrated in the hands of one person, or a group of people, but is shared equally by all the members of a society.

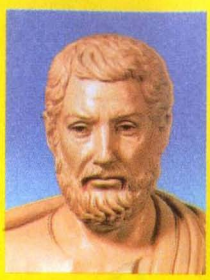
The idea of democracy is based on the belief that everyone should enjoy the same rights and freedom- in short, that all men and women are born equal.

How was democracy practiced in Athens?

Athens was the largest, and most famous of all the city states in Ancient Greece. A form of democracy was practiced here for the first time, and continued for about 100 years.

Athens had an Assembly that met ten times a year. All the citizens of Athens could take part in the Assembly, and vote. Women, children, and slaves were not considered as citizens, and thus could not participate or vote. Each year, there was a drawing. Five hundred names were drawn from a pool of all the citizens of Athens. These 500 citizens had to serve for one year, and were the lawmakers.

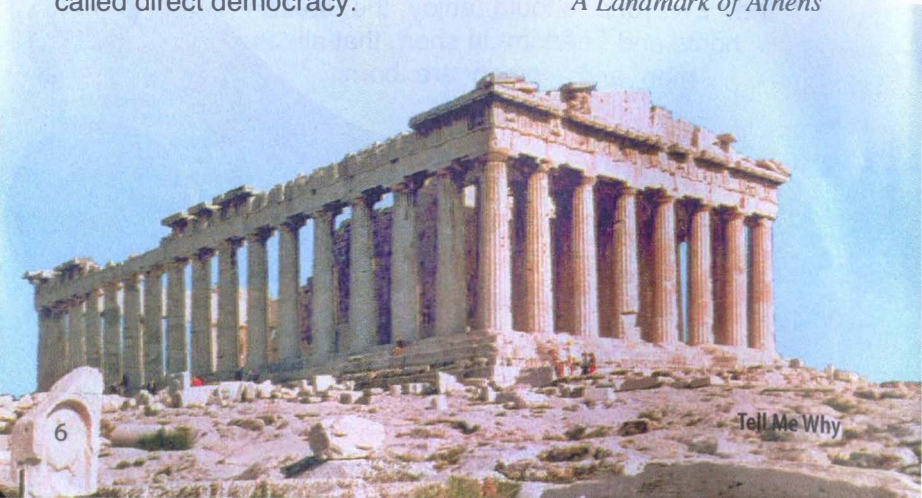
But, nothing they did become law until all the citizens of Athens had a chance to vote for it. This form of democracy is called direct democracy.



Father of Democracy

It is believed that Cleisthenes, an Athenian nobleman, was the Father of Athenian Democracy.

Parthenon, A Landmark of Athens



A sculpture in the Parthenon

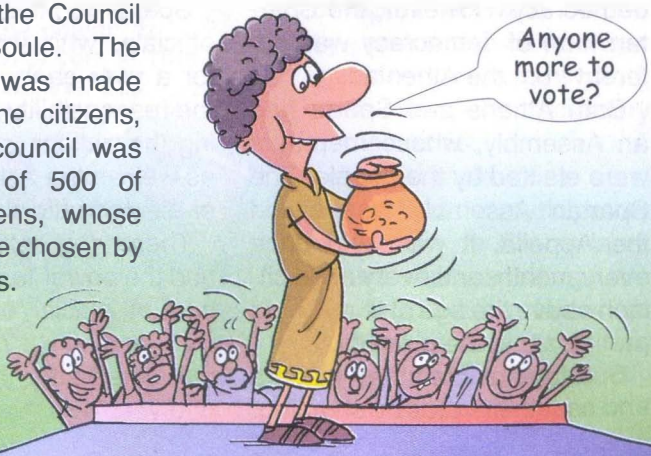
What was the importance of the Assembly and the Council in Ancient Athens?

There were two institutions that were very important in the form of democracy that was practiced in ancient Athens.

One was the Assembly or Ekklesia, and the other was the Council or the Boule. The Assembly was made up of all the citizens, while the council was made up of 500 of these citizens, whose names were chosen by drawing lots.

The members of the Council served the government for a year. They oversaw much of the day-to-day running of the government, drew up new laws, and suggested changes in existing ones.

However, it was the Assembly that finally decided on the laws and changes, by voting on the suggestions put forward by the Council. So, the real power lay with the Assembly.



Ruins of a theatre of Ancient Sparta

How was the electoral system of Sparta different?

Sparta was another city state of ancient Greece that practiced democracy. However, the Spartan form of democracy was different from the Athenian.

Both Athens and Sparta had an Assembly, whose members were elected by the people. The Spartan Assembly was called the Appella. It was held once every month, and every male citizen above the age of thirty could participate in the process.

Spartans elected their leaders and cast their votes by shouting, while the Athenians used stone voting ballots.

Sparta had two kings. Five officials, who were elected for a year each, were given the responsibility of overseeing the actions of the kings, as well as the actions of other elected officials.

These five officials even had the power to remove any corrupt official or king- but they themselves could not be re-elected after their term of one year was over.

FORMS OF DEMOCRACY

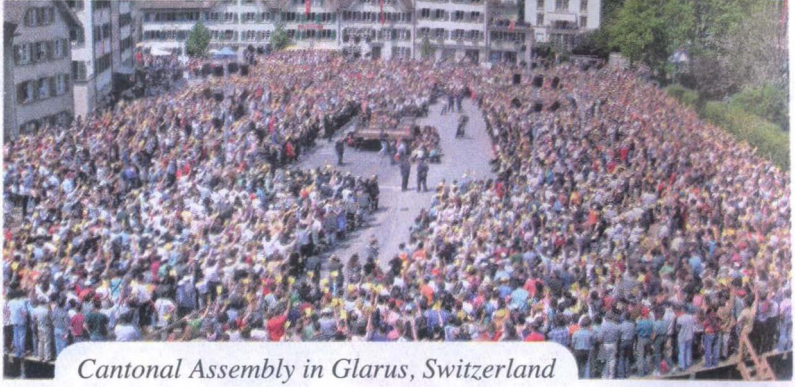
What are the different forms of democracy?

We know that democracy is the rule of the people, but there are many different types of democracy. These include direct, semi-direct, and representative democracy.

In direct democracy, the citizens are personally involved in the process of decision-making. In a representative democracy, on the other hand, people elect representatives who make laws and enact them.

Some modern democracies combine the elements of representative democracy, and direct democracy, and are known as hybrid, semi-direct, or participatory democracies.

An example of a semi direct or participatory democracy is Switzerland, where representatives are elected, but a referendum is often carried out so that the people can vote directly on an important issue.



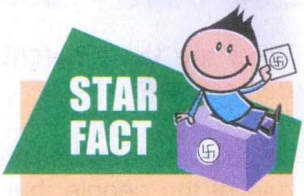
Cantonal Assembly in Glarus, Switzerland

Why is direct democracy not possible in large countries?

In a direct democracy, every citizen participates in the process of decision making personally. There are no elected representatives or intermediaries.

Direct democracy gives the voting population the power to change constitutional laws, and allows the citizens the freedom to put forth initiatives, referendums, and suggestions for laws. Direct democracy also helps citizens to give orders to elective officials, and even remove them for corruption, or breaking a campaign promise.

Obviously, direct democracy is not possible in large countries that have a population of millions, or even a billion! Today, direct democracy only exists in the Swiss cantons of Appenzell Innerrhoden, and Glarus, where the population is small enough to make it workable.



"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country."

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

Why is representative democracy the most acceptable form all over the world?

Representative democracy is a form of government in which elected individuals represent the people who elect them. The elected representatives form an independent ruling body charged with the responsibility of acting in the people's interest, for a specified period of time.

An interesting feature of representative democracy is that while the representatives are elected by the people, to act in the people's interest, they also have the freedom to exercise their own judgment as how best to do so.

There are two types of representative democracy- parliamentary and presidential. The key to a successful representative democracy lies with each and every citizen, and the care with which he identifies, and votes for the best candidate.

Palace of Westminster- the Houses of Parliament, London.

Parliament
House of India

Second Tryst

India adopted the democratic form of government in 1947- but this was not the first time democracy has appeared in India. A thousand years ago, the Chola Empire had also adopted an electoral form of government!

What is parliamentary democracy?

A parliamentary democracy means that political power is held by an elected parliament representing the people. The members of parliament are elected for a specified period of time.

Under a parliamentary democracy, the government is operated by a council of ministers headed by the prime minister. The government is always subjected to reviews by the parliament which has the right to dismiss a prime minister at any point of time if they feel that he is not doing his job properly. This is done by calling for a vote of 'no confidence'. If the vote goes against the prime minister, he has to resign. The opposition, which is usually the second largest party in parliament, also plays an important role in balancing the power of the ruling party.

India is the world's largest parliamentary democracy.

What is the presidential form of democracy?

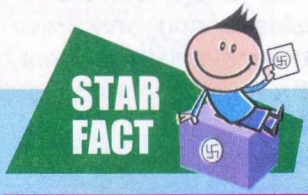
The presidential form of democracy is seen mainly in America, and parts of Africa as well as South East Asia.

It is a form of representative democracy in which the people elect members of the executive branch, such as the president and vice president, as well as the legislative branch, such as Congress members in the USA. Members of Congress are elected at a different time than the president, and only have the power to remove the president from office, if a criminal offence is committed.

The president serves as both the head of state and head of government, while in a parliamentary democracy, the prime minister is the head of the government and the president is head of the state.

Capitol Building - the Seat of the US Congress in Washington, D.C.

Parliament of Switzerland



Two in One

Some countries have a democracy that includes both a prime minister and president who has more powers than the head of state in a parliamentary democracy. Sri Lanka and Portugal are two nations that have a two-in-one or semi presidential democracy.

Why are the Swiss Confederation and some of the states of the USA examples of semi direct democracy?

Switzerland has a democracy that can be described as semi direct, or federal. It is made up of 26 semi-independent cantons or states. Each canton has its own constitution, parliament, laws, and court system.

As well as regular elections, Switzerland has a form of 'direct democracy' where any decision can be put to a referendum. A petition is started, signatures are collected, and if enough signatures are collected, there has to be a referendum which is binding. A referendum can be at the federal, or cantonal level.

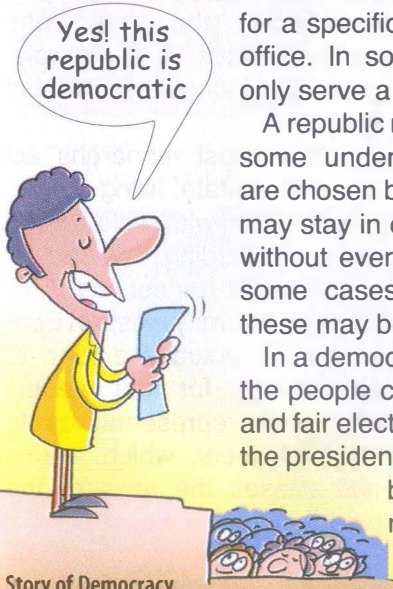
In the USA, some states like California, provide for citizen-sponsored ballot initiatives popularly known as ballot measures and allow for referendums. So, these states too can be said to practice a semi-direct form of democracy.

Roman Forum-City Centre of Ancient Rome

What is a democratic republic?

The term republic goes back to the days of the Roman Republic that has inspired many modern democracies, while the term democracy refers to a government that is elected by the people.

Today, a republic is a country whose head of government is an elected, or chosen president. Sometimes, the president is also the head of state. Presidents are usually elected for a specific length of time, called a term of office. In some countries, a president may only serve a particular number of terms.



A republic may or may not be democratic. In some undemocratic republics, the leaders are chosen by a small number of people, and may stay in office for a long time, sometimes without ever being elected, or re-elected. In some cases, there may be elections, but these may be conducted in corrupt ways.

In a democratic republic, on the other hand, the people choose their leaders through free and fair elections, although in countries where the president has a ceremonial role; it may be by government appointment, rather than by election.

Buckingham Palace-
the seat of the Monarchy of UK

Why is England called a constitutional Monarchy?

England has a form of government that is known as a constitutional monarchy.

A monarchy is a form of government led by an individual who holds the position for life, having inherited the position, and who passes it on to a relative, usually a son or daughter.

In the past, all monarchs held great power, and made all the decisions and laws of the their country. This is known as absolute monarchy.

A constitutional monarchy, on the other hand, is a country which has a written constitution that sets out the rules for how the country will be governed and the rights and responsibilities of its people, and has a monarch as head of state.

Today, most monarchs act as head of state, filling a ceremonial role with little or no power regarding the actual governing of the country. This kind of monarchy exists in England. It is actually a form of democracy, for the people elect their representatives to the parliament, which makes and passes the laws of the land.

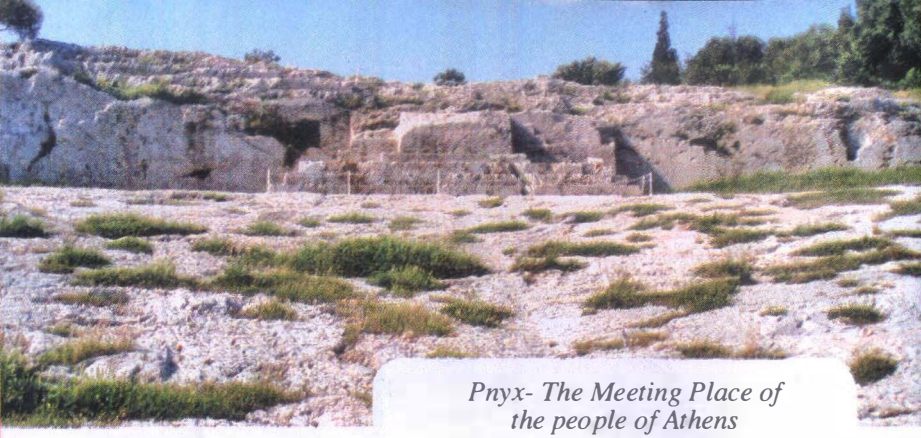
What is a liberal democracy?

A liberal democracy is a form of representative democracy. In a liberal democracy, the elected representatives who hold power are limited by a constitution that emphasizes protecting individual liberties, equality and the rights of minority groups.

Among the many liberties that might be protected are freedom of speech, and assembly, freedom of religion, the right to private property and privacy, as well as equality before the law.

France and Germany are good examples of countries where liberal democracies flourish. To put it in a nutshell, liberal democracies are organised in such a way as to define and limit power, in order to promote legitimate government within a framework of justice and freedom.

Paris, France

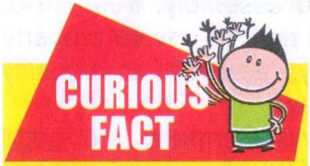


Pnyx- The Meeting Place of the people of Athens

What is a demarchy?

A demarchy is a form of democracy in which there are no elections. Decision makers are randomly selected by drawing lots. These groups, are sometimes termed 'policy juries', 'citizens' juries', or 'consensus conferences'.

They deliberately make decisions about public policies in much the same way that juries decide criminal cases. This system of random selection of decision makers is known as sortition. The Athenian democracy made much use of sortition, with nearly all government offices filled by lottery, rather than by election. The idea of demarchy is that those chosen will be representative of the opinions and interests of the people at large, and be more fair and impartial than elected officials.



The Power of Democracy

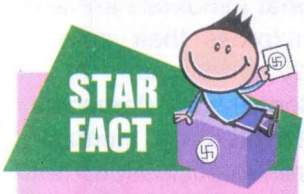
With the exception of some Middle Eastern nations, some of the wealthiest countries in the world are democracies. In fact, the richest 25 countries in the world are democracies, suggesting that democracy is certainly beneficial to the health of a nation.

What is consociational democracy?

Consociational democracy is a form of democracy that involves guaranteed group representation. It is often suggested for managing conflict in deeply divided societies.

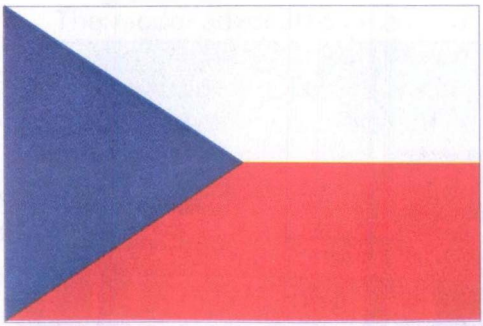
It is usually found in countries that are deeply divided into distinct religious, ethnic, racial, or regional segments. In such places, a stable democracy is difficult. The most striking feature of a consociational democracy is a grand coalition, in which representatives of all significant segments participate in common decision-making with regard to common concerns.

Czechoslovakia was a consociational democracy from 1989 until its partition in 1993.



Short lived 'First'

In 1755, the Republic of Corsica adopted a democratic constitution. This was a historic 'first' which was unfortunately very short lived.



Flag of Former Czechoslovakia

What is a consensus democracy?

In a democracy, decisions are usually made on the basis of a majority vote. In a consensus democracy, however, a broad range of opinions from the citizens are taken into consideration while decision making, so that minorities are able to express their opinion, too.

Consensus democracy is marked by increased citizen participation, both in determining the political agenda, and in the decision-making process itself.

German Parliament Building

It is embodied in certain countries such as Sweden, Lebanon, Iraq and Belgium.Consensus democracy promotes the idea that democracy should represent as many citizens as possible, and that a simple majority should not govern in an unfettered fashion.

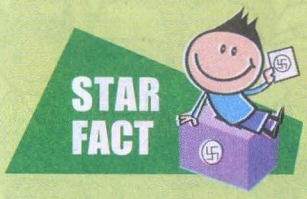
It disperses power so that there are multiple checks and balances, thus limiting the power of the central government, while providing for the representation of a broader array of interests.

What is cosmopolitan democracy?

Cosmopolitan democracy deals with the values of democracy at different levels, from the global, to the local. It dreams of achieving a world order based on the rule of law and democracy.

The model advocated by cosmopolitan democrats is decentralized, and one of global governance without world government. This can be done either through direct participation, or through elected representatives.

Politicians and diplomats, along with many students of political theory and international relations, tend to disregard such ideas. They are, they say, noble but impractical.



American Constitution

The oldest surviving, still active, governmental codified constitution is the Constitution of the United States. It was adopted in 1787, after the American Revolution. It promised an elected government, and protected the civil rights of its citizens. However, it did not end slavery or give voting rights to women. All this came later.

What is participatory polity?

Participatory polity is a theory based on the principle that people should have decision-making power in proportion to how much they are affected by the decision.

According to this theory, there would be local councils of 20 to 25 members that would have total freedom on issues that affect only them. These councils will send delegates to higher level councils that will take decisions regarding the area, and so on.

In addition, a court of randomly chosen citizens will act as a check on the tyranny of the majority. Delegates will be recallable at any time, and referendums can be held whenever necessary.

Signing of the US Constitution
September 17th, 1787

Red Square, Former USSR

What is meant by social democracy?

Social democracy is a political movement that uses principles of democracy to change a capitalist country to a socialist one.

The tools of change that it uses are reforms that are brought about gradually to finally establish a welfare state.

The origins of social democracy have been traced to the 1860s, with the rise of the first major working-class party in Europe.

The Soviet Union was the greatest example of socialist democracy. Even after the fall of the USSR, many countries adopted the ideas of social democracy.

Voting Machine

What is electronic direct democracy?

Electronic direct democracy, also called E- democracy, or EDD, means using 21st century information and communications technology to promote democracy.

EDD requires electronic voting or some other way to register votes on issues electronically. As in any direct democracy, in an EDD, citizens would have the right to vote on legislation, make new legislation, and recall representatives.

Numerous other software development projects are underway to transform EDD, from a dream into an everyday reality.

EDD is the strongest form of direct democracy, in which people are involved in the legislative function. It is also sometimes referred to by many other names, such as open source governance and collaborative governance.

THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY

What were Aristotle's views on democracy?

Aristotle was a great thinker, philosopher, and scientist who lived in Ancient Greece. He was a disciple of an equally great thinker Plato. Aristotle studied in Plato's Academy in Athens.

Aristotle wrote on many subjects like linguistics, politics, and government. He did not really think that democracy is the best form of government- yet his views have played an important role in shaping the concept of democracy.

This is because he put forward the notion of the 'constitution,'- and we know that every democracy is founded on a constitution. He also emphasized that 'the basis of a democratic state is liberty' – and this concept holds good to this day.

Plato and Aristotle

Why is the Magna Carta significant in the history of democracy?

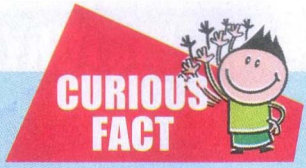
The Magna Carta was a charter that limited the powers of the King of England.

King John of England was compelled by a group of his subjects to sign this document on June 15,th 1215.

King John was a tyrant who imposed many hardships on his people. Finally, a group of nobles forced the King to sign a paper listing their rights. This paper was the Magna Carta.

Even though the Magna Carta was just a list of the rights of the nobles, it was a list of rights signed by the King.

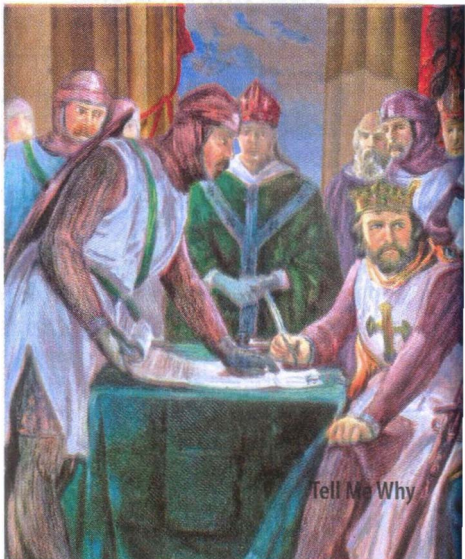
From that point on, the Kings and Queens of England could only do so much without the help of the nobles, and later on, without the help of the people themselves. The Magna Carta did not usher in democracy, but it was a very important step in that direction.



Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson, who later became the third President of the USA, lived in France during the French Revolution. He was one of the main figures involved in the drafting of the American Declaration of Independence.

King John signs the Magna Carta



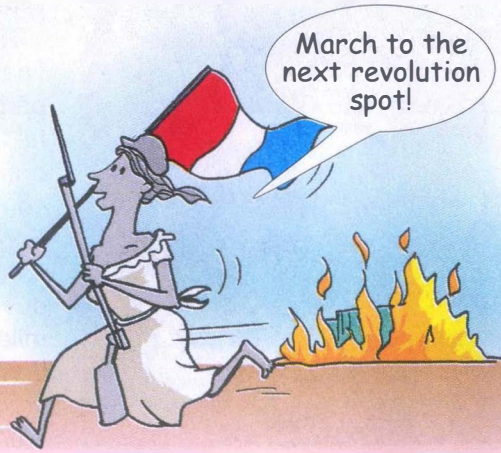
The Storming of the Bastille - An important event of the French revolution

Why is the French Revolution significant in the history of democracy?

When the American Revolution erupted in 1776, King Louis XVI of France supported the American colonies in their bid for independence from the United Kingdom. Little did the king know that he had helped bring about his own downfall.

The French Revolution officially began with a violent action- the Storming of the Bastille on July 14th, 1789. This revolution was one of the bloodiest and most far-reaching revolutions in the history of the world, and led to the end of monarchy in France.

The effects of the French Revolution spread around the world, as absolute monarchies in many other countries were replaced much more peacefully with limited constitutional monarchies, republics, and other democracies.



James II

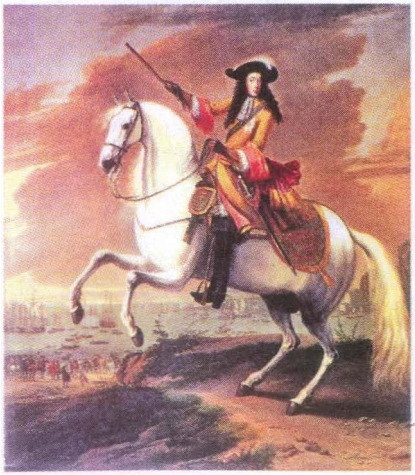
What was the Glorious Revolution's role in the evolution of democracy?

The English Revolution of 1688, called the Glorious Revolution, was not a war. No soldiers went into battle, and no shots were fired. A new king and queen simply took the place of James II, an unpopular king.

James II was overthrown by a union of English parliamentarians, and in his place, a Dutchman, William III of England ruled jointly with his wife Mary II of England.

The Glorious Revolution finally settled the fact that parliament was more powerful than the monarch. It ushered in an era of constitutional monarchy in England.

In this respect, the Glorious Revolution is one of the milestones in the history of democracy.



William III

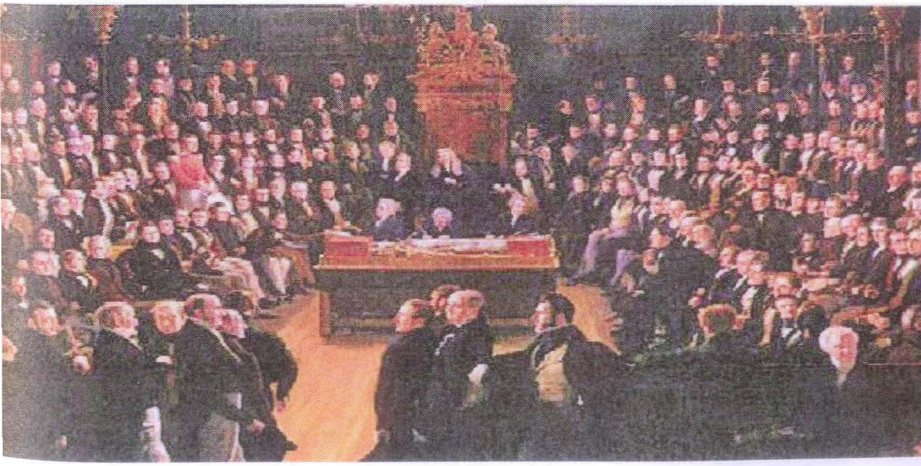
What is the importance of the 1832 Reform Act?

The 1832 Reform Act was the result of a long struggle both in the streets and in parliament. It was the first act to reform Britain's electoral system, and it introduced wide-ranging changes to the electoral system of England and Wales.

Until the 1830s, Britain's elections were neither representative nor balanced. A range of factors determined whether you were eligible to vote.

In a few places, all men could vote, but in the vast majority of locations, it depended on whether you owned property or paid certain taxes. The Reform Act, in its final form enabled about one out of five adult males to vote.

Reform Act of 1832 at British Parliament



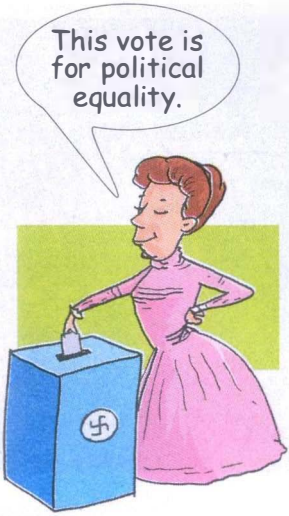
Why does New Zealand have an important role in the history of democracy?

In 1893, New Zealand became the first country to give women the right to vote, decades before the other countries took this step.

This success came at the end of an enormous struggle by women leaders in New Zealand, led by Kate Sheppard. 31,872 signatures were collected during a seven year campaign, which culminated in the 1893 petition for the enfranchisement of women being presented to parliament in a wheelbarrow. It was the largest petition ever gathered in Australasia. Women's enfranchisement in New Zealand was unique in that the vote was extended to all women. In 1893, Elizabeth Yates became the first woman in the British Empire to become a mayor, though she held the post only for about a year.

Elizabeth Yates

Kate Sheppard



Parliament of New Zealand

Martin Luther King Jr. at the venue of his historic speech 'I have a Dream'

What is the importance of the African American Civil Rights Movement?

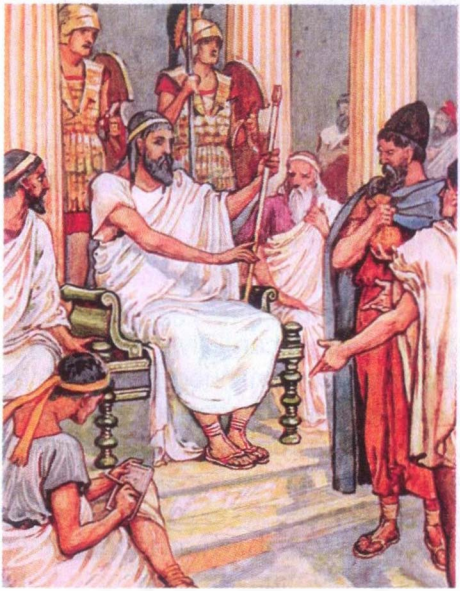
After the American Civil War, many southern states continued to treat African-Americans as second class citizens. They had laws that kept black people separate from white people. Black people were confined to separate schools, restaurants, and transportation. Other laws prevented many black people from voting.

In the early 1900s, black people began to protest against these laws, that they called the Jim Crow Laws. By the 1950s, the civil rights movement, led by Martin Luther King Jr. gained momentum.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. This act outlawed discrimination based on race, national background, and gender. This was definitely a triumph for democracy, and it upheld the concept that all men and women are born equal and free.

A Spark

In 1955, Rosa Parks, an African-American woman living in the USA, refused to give up her seat to a white man in a bus. This lit a spark which flared into the civil rights movement in that country.



Solon - A Painting

Why are Solon and Cleisthenes always associated with democracy?

The ancient Greeks considered Solon to be one of the Seven Wise Men. He wrote a series of laws and reforms called Solon's laws. They covered all aspects of society: economy, marriage, politics, crime and punishments etc.

There were even laws about the citizens' obligation to take part in politics. It was Solon who introduced the Aeropagus, the court, and the boule, a parliament consisting of 500 members, which laid the foundation for democracy.

Cleisthenes, who also lived in Ancient Greece, instituted major reforms that led to Athenian democracy. He is credited with reforming the constitution of ancient Athens, and setting it on a democratic footing in 508 BC.

One of his reforms was that any free man living in Athens or the surrounding area, was a citizen.

Before that, in order to be a citizen, a man had to be born in Athens to parents who were born in Athens.

John Locke

What do we know about John Locke?

John Locke was an influential English philosopher and physician of the late 1600s, whose writings had a significant impact on Western philosophy.

In his works, he put forth his revolutionary ideas concerning the natural rights of man and the social contract. He believed that people had a right to life, to be free, to be healthy, and to keep their own property.

Locke also wrote that if the government interfered with these natural rights, people had a right - even a duty - to revolt and overthrow that government. His writings had a great influence on other European thinkers, and his ideas not only stirred waves in England, but these ripples also spread, and played a role in the American and French Revolutions.

Montesquieu

Baron Montesquieu was a French political thinker who is famous for his theory of separation of powers. His ideas inspired many revolutions, and the spread of democracy.

William Penn visits King Charles II - A Painting

What is the role of William Penn in the history of the United States of America?

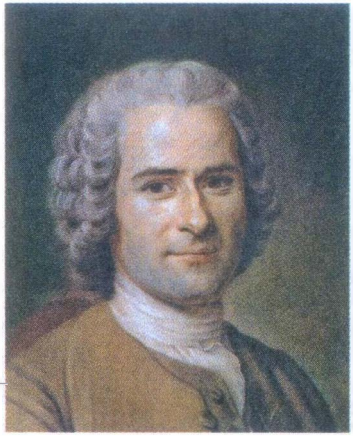
William Penn was a philosopher who promoted the ideals of religious tolerance and believed in democracy. He was granted ownership by Charles II, of a vast territory south of New York in 1681.

Penn strongly believed not only in peace, but also searching out ways of resolving conflicts through nonviolent means.

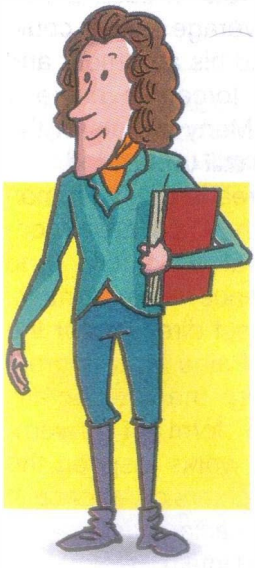
In his writings, he expressed the hope that both disputes between sovereigns, and those between the rulers and their subjects, might be resolved on the basis not of force but of justice.

Thus, he developed a forward-looking project through the creation of a European Assembly made of deputies that could discuss controversies peacefully.

Moreover, it is the democratic principles that he set forth that have served as an inspiration for the United States Constitution.



Rousseau

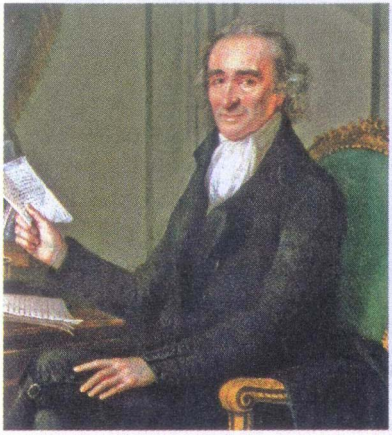


Why is Rousseau's name significant to the concept of democracy?

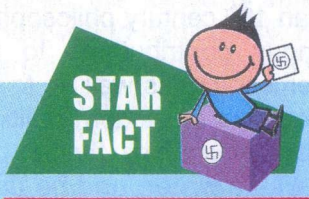
Rousseau, an 18th century philosopher, made enormous contributions to the concept of democracy, as well as to the overall development of modern political, sociological, and educational thought.

Rousseau was a writer, and he used everything from opera to novels to explain his philosophy. He believed that human beings are inherently good, but are corrupted by the evils of society. He considered science, art and social institutions to be a part of what corrupts.

Rousseau believed that the only way to get back to goodness, is to be as close to nature as possible. His ideas influenced the French Revolution, as well as the overall development of French society.



Thomas Paine



Enlightenment

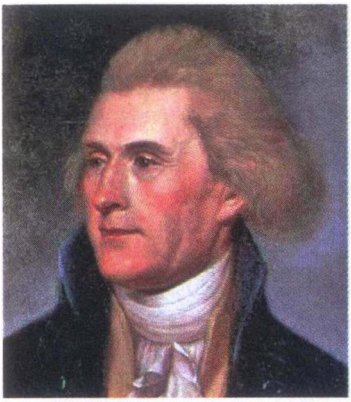
In the late 17th century, Europe entered into what is known as the Age of Enlightenment. This cultural movement put the focus on reason and individualism, rather than on following tradition blindly.

How did Thomas Paine contribute to democracy?

Thomas Paine was a great thinker and author. In one of his works 'The Age of Reason', he advocated reason and free thought, and argued against institutionalized religion in general, and Christian doctrine in particular. He also published a pamphlet 'Common Sense' in 1776. In this pamphlet, Paine argued that the American colonies should break away from British rule.

Paine wrote in such a way that the average reader could understand his argument and would be forced to make a decision. Many people of the time were still undecided.

After reading 'Common Sense,' they became convinced that revolution and independence from Britain, was the best direction for the colonies. Paine was a great believer in the democratic republican form of government. His works inspired the freedom fighters of America in 1776 to declare independence from Britain.



Thomas Jefferson

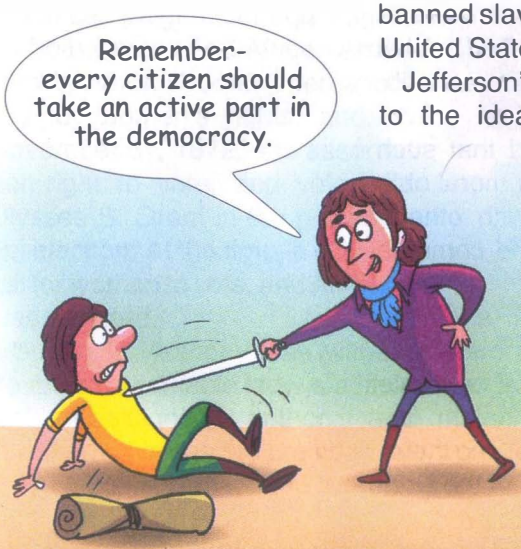
Why is Thomas Jefferson considered one of the principal architects of democracy?

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, was one of the Founding Fathers of the USA, and the principal author of the American Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson believed that every citizen should take an active part in the process of democracy. Jefferson initiated public education, established a national library, and paved the way for the abolishment of slavery. In 1807, he drafted and signed into law a bill that banned slave importation into the United States.

Jefferson's faith and dedication to the idea of self-government never wavered, even in the face of many personal hardships.

Thomas Jefferson is considered to be one of the principal architects of democracy.



What is the significance of Giuseppe Mazzini?

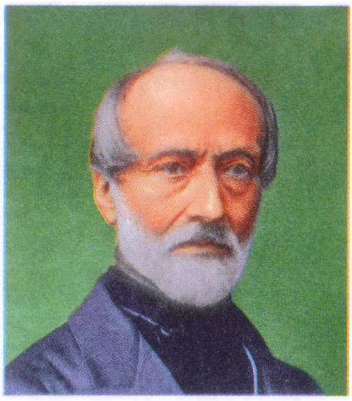
Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian activist-philosopher, was one of the most influential public voices in 19th century Europe.

He was an enemy of the old monarchies, and conceived of the nation as a means to achieve democracy and international peace.

In 1815, most of Italy was controlled by the Austrian Empire. Several movements for national unification and independence arose, and Mazzini joined their fight early in his life. In his writings, he declared that all humans are created equal by God, which entitles them to certain basic liberties.

Mazzini also argued that such equality also implies a moral obligation to associate with others, and to work toward the common good.

He campaigned for a United Republic of Italy, and his efforts helped to unite several separate Italian states into one nation. But Mazzini's dream did not end there-he wanted to bring about the United States of Europe.



Giuseppe Mazzini

Who was Susan B. Anthony?

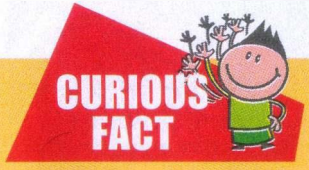
Susan B. Anthony was an American civil rights leader who was instrumental in the Women's Suffrage Movement, which was a quest to grant women the right to vote.

In 1863, along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she founded the Women's Loyal National League, which conducted the largest petition drive in the nation's history up to that time, collecting nearly 400,000 signatures in support of the abolition of slavery.

In 1866, they initiated the American Equal Rights Association, which campaigned for equal rights for both women and African Americans. Anthony worked internationally for women's rights, and on November 5th, 1872, she asserted her right to vote, and voted for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election. At the time, it was illegal for women to vote, and Anthony was arrested.

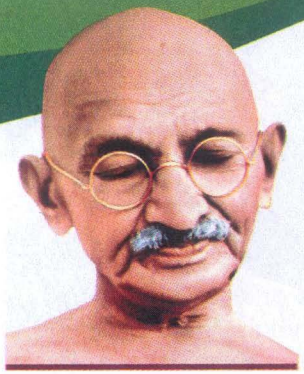
Susan B. Anthony was without doubt, a remarkable lady- a suffragist, abolitionist, author, and speaker, who was the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Susan B. Anthony



Savarkar

Giuseppe Mazzini had a profound influence on an Indian leader during the struggle for Indian Independence. He was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.



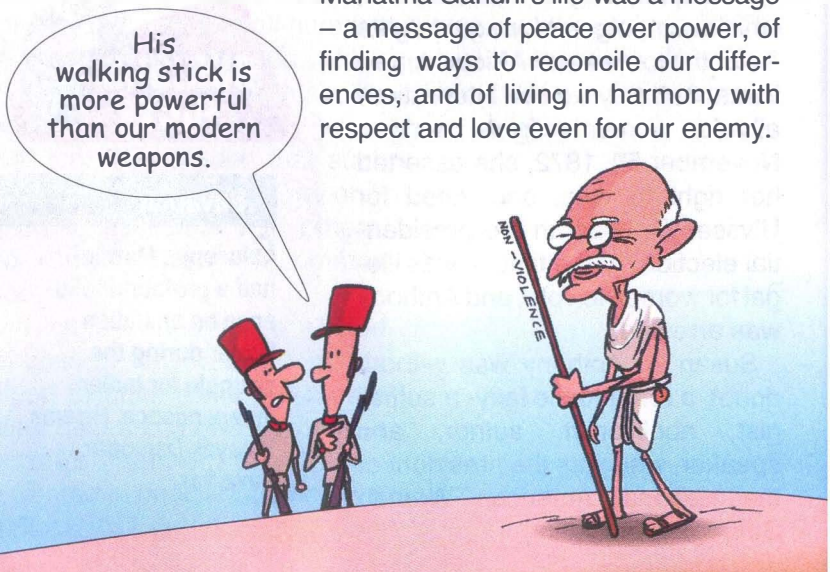
Mahatma Gandhi

Why is Mahatma Gandhi's name written in letters of gold in the book of democracy?

Mahatma Gandhi inspired the world with his faith in truth and justice for all mankind.

Mahatma Gandhi was the architect of India's non violent struggle for freedom from British rule. Gandhjii led nationwide campaigns for easing poverty, expanding women's rights, building religious and ethnic amity, and ending untouchability. His ultimate goal was the freedom of India.

After a long struggle, India became independent on 15th August 1947. Mahatma Gandhi's life was a message – a message of peace over power, of finding ways to reconcile our differences, and of living in harmony with respect and love even for our enemy.



What were the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr. to democracy?

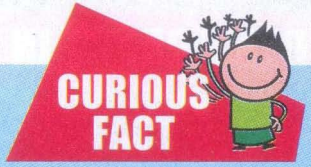
Between 1955 and 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. helped change America.

He brought to the world's attention how unfairly blacks were treated. He had the help of millions of Americans, but his strong leadership, and unprecedented power of speech gave people the faith and courage to keep working peacefully even when others did not.

This led to new laws that ended the practice of keeping people of different backgrounds apart, making life fairer for everyone.

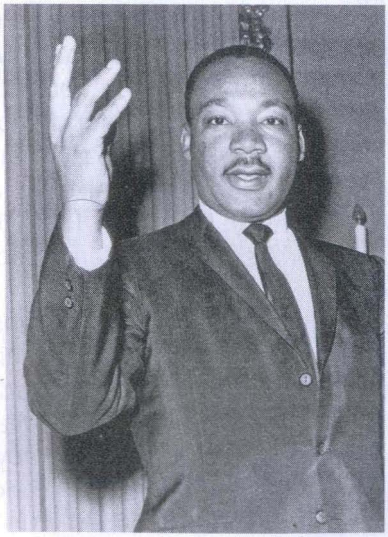
Martin Luther King, Jr. was an eloquent and powerful speaker. All those heard him speak took pride in their own self-worth and their commitment to social change, justice, and democracy.

On October 14th 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through non-violence.

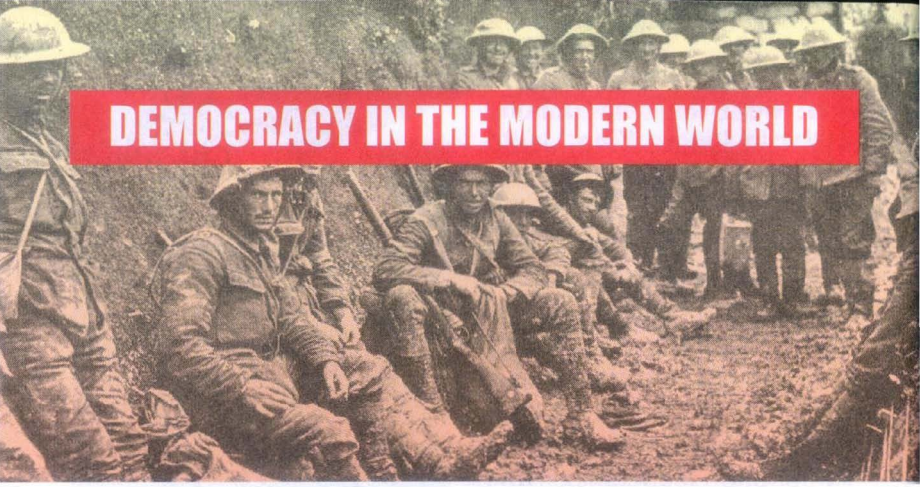


On a Coin

Susan Anthony's portrait appeared on the 1979 US dollar coin. It was the first time the portrait of a woman other than a model or the Statue of Liberty had appeared on a coin.



Martin Luther King, Jr.



DEMOCRACY IN THE MODERN WORLD

Why was the end of the First World War important for democracy?

World War I

World War I – the bitter, brutal conflict became known as the Great War, and the War to End All Wars- ended with the aim of making the world safe for democracy.

At the end of World War I, many countries like Finland granted universal suffrage for its citizens. In Russia, in 1917, there were a few months of liberal democracy until Lenin's rule.

Similarly, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granted full US citizenship to America's indigenous peoples, called 'Indians'.

However, the end of World War I saw only temporary gains for democracy. But, what is important is that though World War I may not have made the world safe for democracy, it did make an effort to achieve that goal.

What was the impact of World War II on democracy?

World War II was history's largest, and most significant armed conflict.

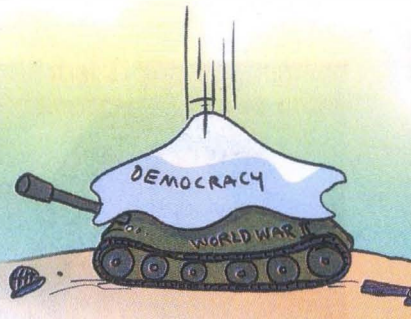
The war involved some 50 Allied nations, most notable among which were the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, United States, and China, against the Axis nations which included Germany, Italy and Japan.

For six years, armies, navies, and air units would fight across millions of square kilometres of sea and land.

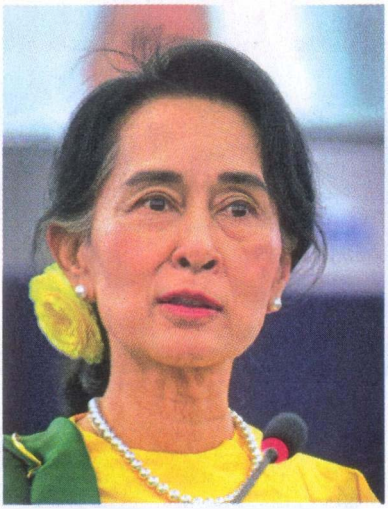
World War II was ultimately a victory for democracy in Western Europe. In most of the countries, representative governments that reflected the general will of their citizens, came into power.

During this period, India became a democratic republic too. After holding its first national elections in 1951-52, India achieved the status of the world's largest democracy.

Most of the French and British colonies that became independent opted for democratic governments as well.



World War II



Aung San Suu Kyi

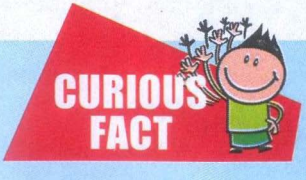
Why is the 21st century significant for democracy?

The 21st century has seen democracy gain momentum, throughout the world, especially in Asia and Africa.

Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Syria and Myanmar have all been caught up in the passion for democracy that is sweeping the world.

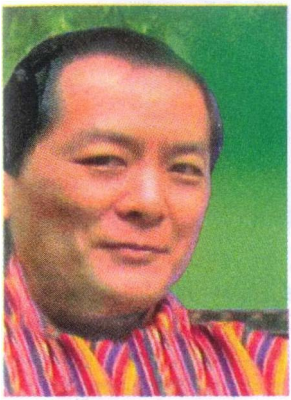
In the 20th century, the number of democratic countries in the world increased dramatically.

At the beginning of the 21st century, more than one third of the world's countries were full-fledged democracies, and another one sixth had at least some democratic institutions.



A New Wave of Hope

In the 17th and 18th centuries the world witnessed a number of studies on democracy. The most important of these were: John Locke's 'Two Treatises of Government,' Jean-Jacques Rousseu's 'The Social Contract,' and Baron de Montesquieu's 'The Spirit of the Laws'.



Jigme Singye Wangchuck

Why is it said that 21st century marked the rise of democracy in Asian countries?

In the 21st century, democracy movements have been seen across the continent Asia. In the Arab world, a huge cry for democracy sprouted in many countries like Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan and Syria. This revolutionary wave was given the term Tunisia Effect, as well as the Arab Spring.

In Iran, following a highly-disputed presidential vote, Iranian citizens held a major series of protests demanding democratic rights.

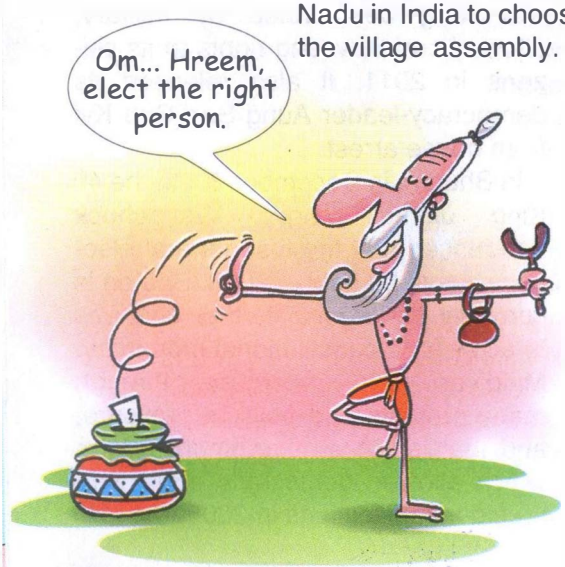
In South East Asia, Myanmar, which was long been ruled by military, allowed certain voting rights to its citizens in 2011. It also released its democracy-leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.

In Bhutan, in December 2005, the 4th King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that the first general elections would be held in 2008. Bhutan is currently undergoing further changes to allow for a constitutional monarchy. Maldives, too undergone through many protests and political pressure, and that led to a government reform which allowed democratic rights and presidential elections in 2008.

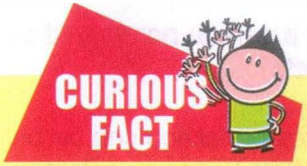
What are elections?

An election is a tool to select representatives in a democracy. It is the actual mechanism by which the people living in a particular region or country choose an individual to hold public office.

In ancient times, elections have been held both in Rome and Greece, and even in Vedic India to select certain rulers. In 920 AD, elections were held in what is now known as Tamil Nadu in India to choose the representatives to the village assembly. During the Middle Ages too, elections were held to select rulers like the Holy Roman Emperor while the Arabs elected their caliphs, Uthman and Ali, in the early medieval Rashidun Caliphate.



However, elections as we know them in modern times began only in the 17th century, in North America and Europe.



Word 'Ballot'

The word 'ballot' is derived from the Italian word 'ballotta'. In ancient times, the Greeks voted with a white ball to say 'yes' for a candidate, and a black ball to say 'no'. The term 'blackballed' – which means to deny a person a position- comes from this practice.

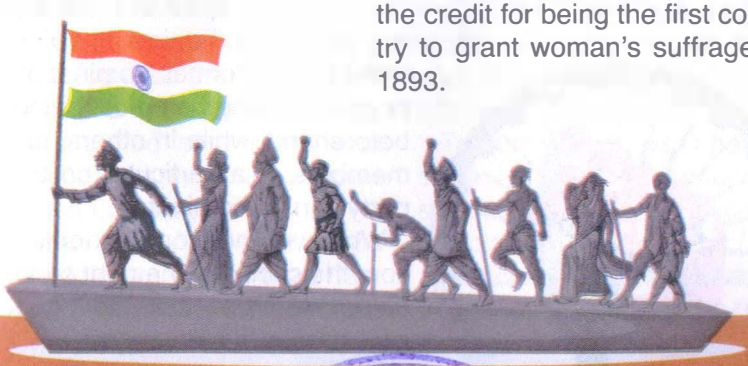
Why has universal suffrage dominated the history of elections?

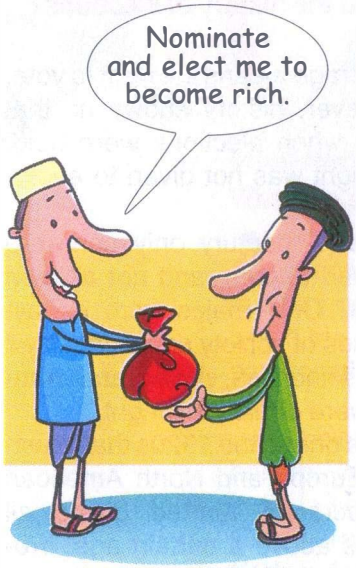
Suffrage means the right to vote. However, history shows us that even when elections were held, the right was not given to everyone.

In the 17th century, only men were allowed to vote- and not all men either. Only males from certain classes of society could cast their vote. Minorities, slaves, and women, were denied this right.

It was only in the 1920s that Western Europe and North American democracies started giving all males above a certain age, irrespective of their class, the right to vote. This was known as universal male suffrage.

But women were still denied this right, and New Zealand takes the credit for being the first country to grant woman's suffrage in 1893.





How is a person nominated as a candidate?

Before an election can be held, a candidate has to be selected to stand for election. There is a procedure for this process that is known as nomination. In India, a person within the eligible age limit who satisfies the norms and standards of the Election Commission can submit his nomination independently. Usually, however, political parties have a process of pre-selection before they nominate their candidate.

Procedures for nomination vary throughout the world. In direct democracies, any eligible person can be nominated by anyone- or, an eligible person can be nominated through a petition.

In some representative democracies, voters are free to choose any person at the time of voting, without any formal nominations or campaigning being conducted beforehand, while in others, only members of a particular political party can be nominated.

Whatever the mode of nomination, the choice of the right candidates is the key to good governance in a democracy.

What are the functions of the electoral system?

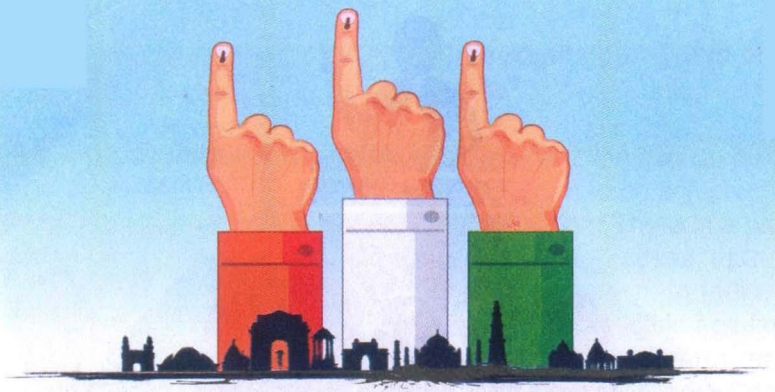
Voting isn't just important to democracy. Voting is democracy. The term electoral system is used to describe the method and rules of counting votes to determine the outcome of elections.

Various systems of voting are used in different countries. Once the votes are cast, they are counted and tallied, and the result is announced based on the final tally.

Winners may be determined according to one of three factors. A candidate may win with a plurality,the term used for a majority of more than 50 per cent of the vote, or an extraordinary majority which refers to a percentage of the vote greater than 50 percent. Finally, a candidate may be chosen unanimously, when all the votes are for him.

Candidates for public office may be elected directly or indirectly. In some areas there may be proportional representation.

To sum up, you can't have a successfully run democratic system without the support, and votes of the citizens, and an efficient electoral system to translate these votes into political decisions.

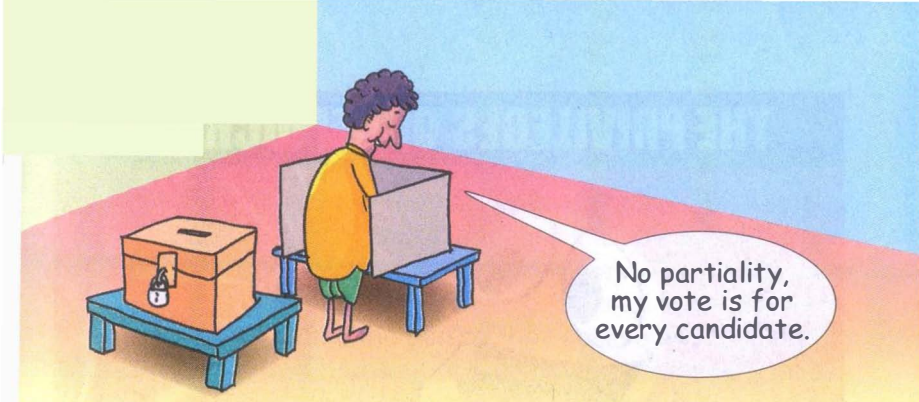


Why are elections held at fixed intervals?

In a democracy, the elected representatives are accountable to the people who elected them. To ensure that the representatives are truly accountable, it is important that they should return and seek a fresh vote from the people at regular intervals.

Therefore, in a democracy, elections are held on the basis of a set schedule known to the electorate, either on a specified date, or within a particular time frame. In India, the world's largest democracy, elections are held in phases because of its size and population, and may last for a month.

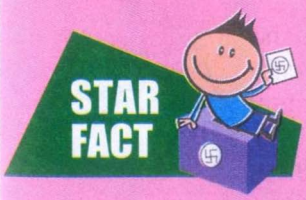
In India, general elections are held once every five years, unless the lower house of parliament – known as the Lok Sabha – is dissolved earlier for some extraordinary reason. This provides citizens with the opportunity to change their leaders if they are not satisfied with their performance, and to support new policies at regular intervals.



Why is it important to have a secret ballot?

The secret ballot plays an important role in ensuring free and fair elections. This system requires that a person votes secretly behind a closed door during elections, for his preferred candidate. One of the most common forms of the secret ballot involves printed ballot papers, with the name of the candidates placed in a list against respective checkboxes. Provisions are made at the polling place for the voters to record their preferences by ticking the checkbox for their candidate. This is done in secret. The ballots are designed to eliminate bias, and to prevent anyone from linking voter to ballot.

The secret ballot system enables every voter to vote confidently and secretly, without any fear of intimidation after the election, or during the exercise.



Secret Ballots

In Ancient Greece, secret ballots were often used when elections were held on sensitive issues. It was in 139 BC that Ancient Rome first introduced the laws regulating elections.

THE PRIVILEGES OF DEMOCRACY

Why is freedom of speech important to democracy?

Freedom of speech and expression is the cornerstone of democratic rights and freedoms. It is essential in enabling democracy to work. It also ensures public participation in decision-making.

Citizens cannot exercise their right to vote effectively, or take part in public decision-making, if they do not have free access to information and ideas, and are not able to express their views freely. Freedom of speech and expression allows citizens to express their thoughts freely in the print and visual media. This important right allows the citizen to speak his or her mind freely without fear of punishment, and even to protest against policies of the government.

Freedom of speech and expression is thus, not only important for individual dignity, but also for the survival of democracy.

Why is the right to vote called the heart of democracy?

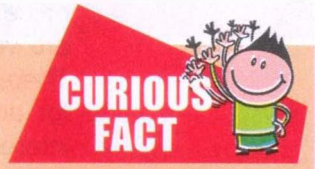
The right to vote is called the heart of democracy, because it allows people to participate in their government. People have the opportunity to vote for what they believe in, and the person they believe will carry it out.

Voting also holds representatives accountable for the decisions they make while in office. In all democracies, representatives are voted to power for certain fixed period. Therefore, if a representative wants to run for another term, he must act in the best interest of the people in order to have their support in a future election. On the other hand, if a representative does not satisfy the needs of the people, the people will not vote for him or her, for a second term. Therefore, it is the right to vote that makes democracy truly the rule of the people.

What are the rights of a citizen in a democracy?

In a democracy, every citizen has certain basic rights that the state cannot take away from them. These rights are internationally guaranteed. For example, everyone has the right to have their own beliefs, including their religious beliefs, and to say and write what they think. Everyone has the right to seek different sources of information and ideas. Everyone has the right to associate with other people, and to form and join organizations of their own choice.

Everyone has the right to assemble, and to protest against government actions. However, citizens have an obligation to exercise these rights peacefully, with respect for the law, and for the rights of others.



Before the Ballot

Before the secret ballot was introduced, elections used to be very corrupt. Candidates used to try and bribe people to vote for them, or threaten them with dire consequences if they didn't. The secret ballot put an end to such practices, and made elections truly fair and free.

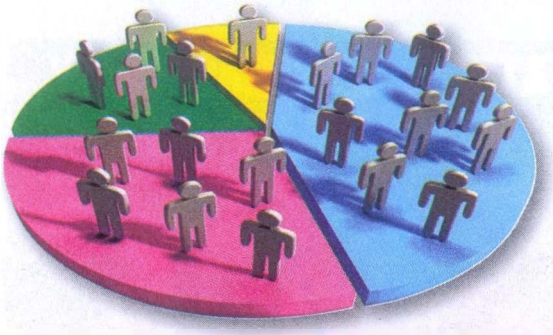
THE LIMITATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Why democracy does not work in every country?

In developing countries, democracy does not always work as efficiently as it does in more developed countries.

One reason for this is because elections are held at fixed intervals, and if a new government that is voted to power does not continue the policies of the previous one, this might lead to economic instability.

Another point is that in a democracy, it is the majority party that holds the reins of government- not necessarily the party with the best vision for the country. Very often, inefficient and corrupt persons get themselves elected. Moreover, for a voter to make an informed decision, he should be educated. In developing countries, many of the voters are uneducated. Very often, votes are cast on the basis of caste, or religion, and it is not really the best candidate who gets elected.



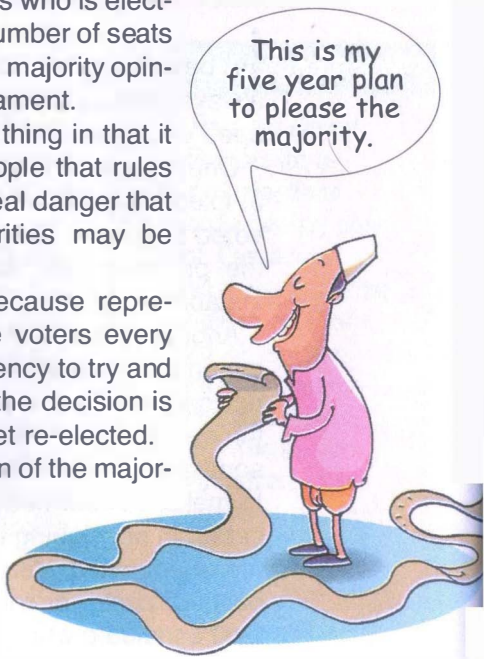
What are the disadvantages of a majority opinion being the decisive factor in a democracy?

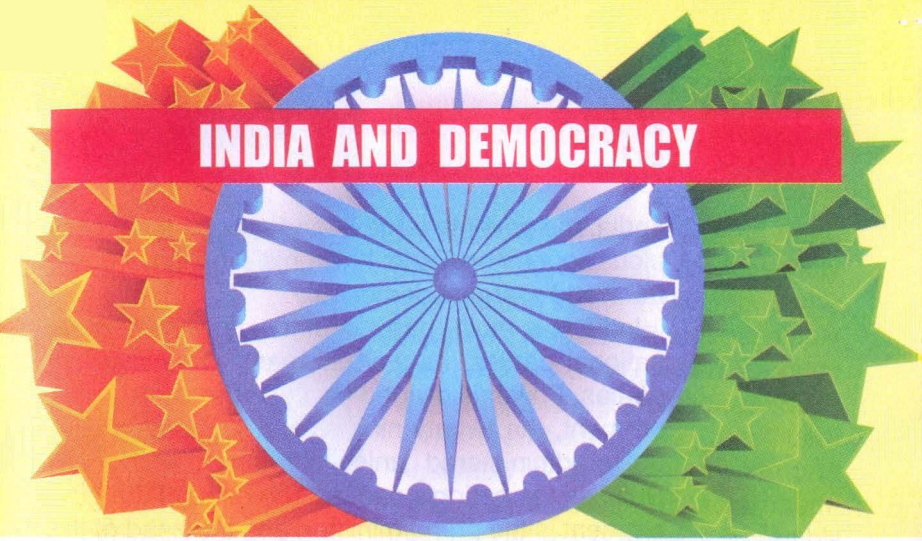
In today's democracies, it is usually the candidate with the most votes who is elected, the party with the most number of seats that comes to power, and the majority opinion that passes laws in parliament.

While this may be a good thing in that it is the will of most of the people that rules the country, there is a very real danger that the best interests of minorities may be overlooked.

Another danger is that because representatives have to face the voters every five years, there will be tendency to try and please the majority, even if the decision is not a right one, in order to get re-elected.

Moreover, when the opinion of the majority is sought for everything, decisions cannot be taken as swiftly as an individual decision, or the decisions of a small group.





Why can democracy be traced to Ancient India?

Ancient Greece is usually called the cradle of democracy, but a form of democracy existed in ancient India too.

Self governing communities existed in India even in the Vedic period. The Rig Veda makes a reference to two institutions, the Samiti and the Sabha, which have some forms of similarity with the modern parliament. The Samiti was an assembly of the tribe, and one of its important functions was to elect the king. The Sabha was the village assembly where the members would meet and discuss important matters. It was generally attended by nobles.

In fact, Ancient India had many functioning republics, regional councils, city councils, and village councils – all of which are the elements of democracy.

What are the characteristics of Indian democracy?

India, the seventh largest, and second most populous country on Earth, has the distinction of being the world's largest democracy.

India is a multi- party democracy with six main national parties, as well as many other regional parties. Power is divided between the central government, the twenty nine states, and seven centrally administered union territories, with New Delhi as the nation's capital. The head of the government is the prime minister, and the head of the nation is the president.

Laws are enacted by parliament, which has two chambers- the popularly elected Lok Sabha, and the indirectly elected Rajya Sabha. The Lok Sabha has no more than 552 members, who have to stand for election every five years, while the Rajya Sabha has no more than 250 members, who serve 6-year terms.

In India, every citizen above the age of 18 has the right to vote, and the Indian Constitution guarantees its citizens a lengthy list of fundamental rights, including freedom of speech and religion.

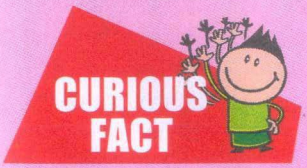
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

What was the origin of the first sovereign legislature of Indian democracy?

In 1947, when India became independent, a Constituent Assembly was created by the Indian Independence Act. This constituent assembly was declared a fully sovereign body with complete legislative powers.

The members of the Constituent Assembly were elected by the provincial assemblies. The total membership of the Constituent Assembly was 389. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was the Chairman of this Constituent Assembly, the main function of which was to frame a constitution for independent India.

The drafting committee under Dr. B. R. Ambedkar recommended the parliamentary type of government. This was approved and on 26th January, 1950, the Constitution of India came into force.



Origins of Government

The origins of the modern parliamentary form of government lie in Sweden. The modern concept of the prime ministerial form of government comes from Britain.

Why is the constitution is called the soul of Indian democracy?

After the independence of India in 1947, it took 2 years, 11 months, and 18 days, to draft the Indian constitution.

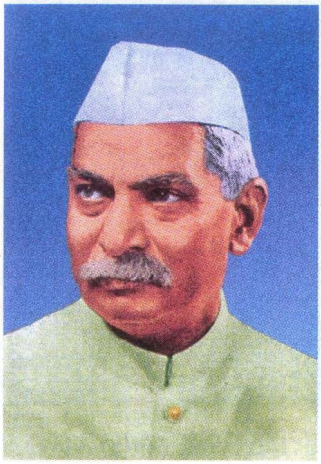
On 26th November 1949, India adopted its constitution, and it came into effect on 26th January 1950. This day- 26th January- is therefore, celebrated as Republic day in India.

The Indian Constitution is the framework of duties and rules of different Indian governing bodies and its people. It describes the duties, procedures to carry out the governmental works, and also the duties of the citizen of India.

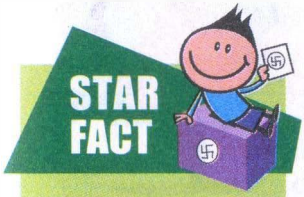
It is the longest written constitution, and contains 448 articles in 22 parts, 12 schedules, and 118 amendments. It was handwritten- with the original copies still carefully preserved- both in Hindi and English.

The Indian Constitution declares India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic, assuring its citizens of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is called the father of Indian Constitution, which is considered to be the soul of Indian democracy.



Dr. Rajendra Prasad



Language of Parliament

The official languages of the Indian parliament are English and Hindi. Members can also speak in their mother tongue if they so wish, and provision has been made for simultaneous translation into the official languages.

How has the Indian Constitution adopted ideas from other constitutions?

Many of the features of the Indian Constitution have been adopted from the constitutions of other countries. These include the British model of parliamentary democracy, while the system of federal government with a strong centre and different state governments were inspired from the constitution of Canada.

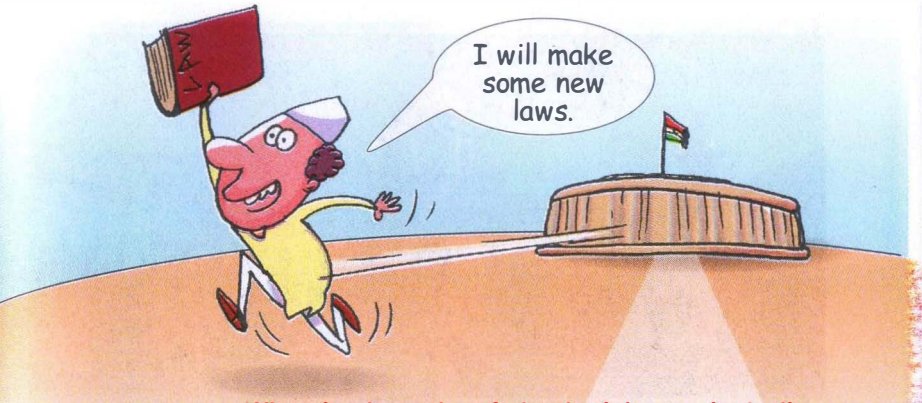
Many of the principles of the Constitution of the United States- like the establishment of a Supreme Court- have been incorporated. The principle of suspension of fundamental rights during emergency was a feature of the German Constitution. Ideas have also been borrowed from the constitutions of Australia and Ireland - and the final result is a constitution that is the essence of everything every Indian believes in, and is proud of.

How is the Indian parliamentary system different from that of Great Britain?

The Indian parliamentary system is modelled on the British system, yet there are many differences between them. The British Parliament has grown through some three hundred years. It is the only institution which exercises sovereign powers, and on which there are no limits, because there is no written constitution.

In India, we have a written constitution, and the powers and authorities of every organ of government and every functionary are defined. Our constitution provides for the fundamental rights of the individual that are upheld by the courts of law. Our parliament is the representative institution of the people- but it is not sovereign in the sense in which the British Parliament is sovereign.

Main Committee Room in Parliament House Annexe



What is the role of the legislature in Indian democracy?

In India, legislative power- or the power to make or change laws- is exercised by the Parliament, which consists of the President, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

The Rajya Sabha is considered to be the upper house and consists of members appointed by the president and elected by the state and territorial legislatures. Members of the Lok Sabha are elected by the people themselves. The members of the cabinet, including the prime minister and the council of ministers, are either chosen from parliament, or elected within six months of assuming office.

The budget session of parliament always begins with the President's address, and if there is a deadlock in legislation process between the two houses of Parliament, the President summons a joint session to break the impasse. The Indian Parliament does exercise some control over the executive branch or the government.

Rashtrapati Bhavan

Why is the executive power held by the President of India unique?

In India, democracy has three pillars- the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

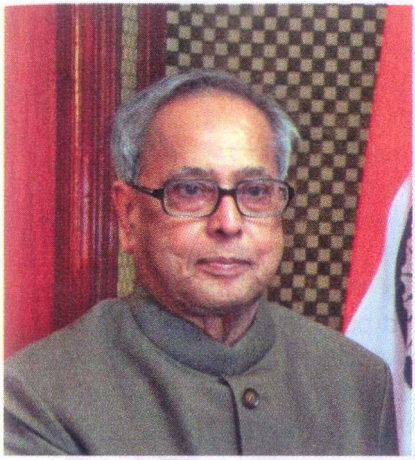
The legislative branch makes changes and passes laws- and it is the responsibility of the executive branch to carry out these laws. The executive branch or government governs the country on behalf of the parliament.

The President's role in the executive is unique. He enjoys all constitutional powers, but in practice, has to act in accordance with the advice given by the head of government, or the cabinet.

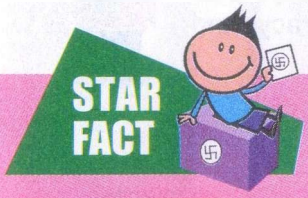
The President has a right to be informed of all of the nation's affairs, enjoys powers to appoint and remove high constitutional authorities, including the prime minister and the council of ministers.

All appointments of the judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts, the state governors, the attorney general, the comptroller and auditor general and the chief commissioner and members of the Election Commission are made in his name.

The President of India is also the commander in chief of the Indian armed forces.



Pranab Mukherjee - The President of India



Vice President

The second- highest ranked official in the executive branch, after the President, is the Vice President. He or she is also the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

What is the importance of the judiciary in Indian democracy?

In India, the legislature makes and passes laws, the executive carries them out, - and the judiciary ensures that justice is done if these laws are broken in any way.

The judiciary prevents violation of the law, and by way of interpreting the existing laws, make new laws. The highest federal court, namely the Supreme Court, decides constitutional questions. It consists of a Chief Justice and 30 other judges, all appointed by the President on the advice of the Chief Justice of India.

The judiciary acts on its own without the limitations of the legislature and the executive. It ensures that all citizens are treated equally, and that every citizen in the land gets justice.

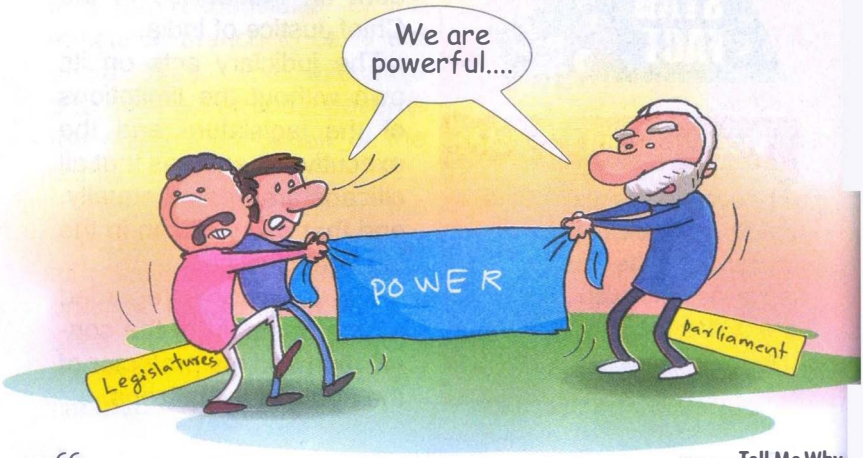
The judiciary is regarded as the guardian of the constitution and the protector of the rights of the citizens.

How is legislative power in India divided between the union parliament and state legislatures?

In India, legislative powers do not rest with the union parliament alone. The legislative assemblies of the different states of the union can pass laws independently too.

The constitution of India gives the union parliament the right to make and pass laws in 97 important areas like banking, defence, railways, communication and currency. The state legislative assemblies, on the other hand, have been given the power to pass laws in 66 fields, including public order, police, administration of justice etc.

However, in 47 areas, both the union parliament and the state legislatures can pass laws. This division of legislative powers is an important feature of Indian democracy- and one of its greatest strengths.



What are the general functions of the parliament?

The main duties of both the Houses of the Indian Parliament- the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha- are to make laws, pass bills, and decide on issues like price control, social safety, foreign policy, defence and national security.

Every bill has to be passed by both the Houses, and assented to by the President before it becomes law. The subjects over which the Union Parliament can legislate are those important subjects which for reasons of convenience, and security are administered on all-India basis.

One of the most important sessions of parliament is the budget session, because it decides the financial management policies of the country. Parliament also has the right to amend the constitution when the need arises.

Besides passing laws, Parliament can exercise control over the administration of the country, and safeguard people's liberties.

A view of the colonnade of the Indian Parliament Building

A view of the Lok Sabha Chamber

Why is the Lok Sabha known as the 'House of the People'?

The Lok Sabha, sometimes referred to as the Lower House of Parliament, is made up of representatives who are elected directly by the people. It is for this reason that it is also known as the 'House of the People'.

Every citizen of India, man or woman, who is above the age of 18, has the right to vote, regardless of caste, community, religion, or creed. The Lok Sabha has a maximum strength of 552 members, of which 530 represent the states, 20 represent the union territories, and 2 seats are for the Anglo Indian community, whose representatives can be nominated by the President.

The present strength is 543 plus two nominated members.

The total membership is distributed among the states in such a way that the ratio between the number of seats allotted to each state, and the population of the state is, as far as possible, the same for all states.

The members elect a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker from among themselves. The representatives are elected for a period of five years, but the Lok Sabha can be dissolved earlier, under certain conditions.

Speaker's Chair in the Lok Sabha Chamber

Sessions

The Lok Sabha convenes in three sessions every year- the Budget Session, the Monsoon Session, and the Winter Session. In the Rajya Sabha, the Budget Session is split into two sessions.

● *Sneha Rao*

A view of Rajya Sabha Chamber

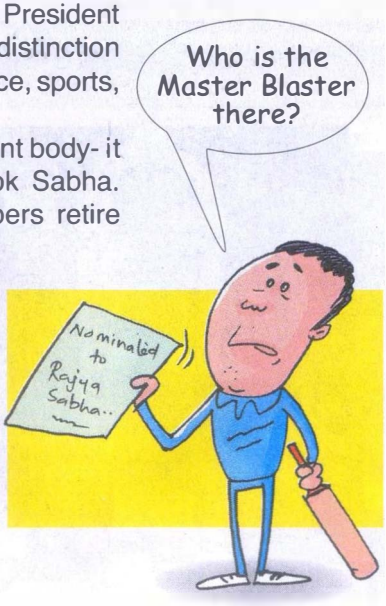
What are the features of the Rajya Sabha?

The Rajya Sabha is also called the Upper House of Parliament, and has 250 members. Its members are elected by the Legislative Assemblies of the various states.

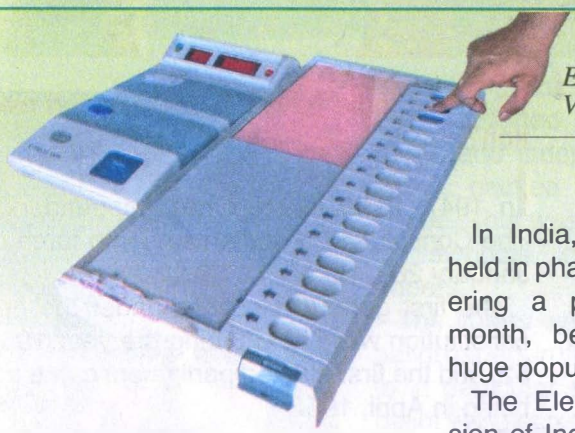
Every state is allotted a certain number of members. Twelve of the Rajya Sabha members are nominated by the President from persons who have earned distinction in the fields of literature, art, science, sports, and social service.

The Rajya Sabha is a permanent body- it cannot be dissolved like the Lok Sabha. However, one-third of its members retire every two years, which means that each member has a term of six years.

The Vice President is the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. However, in financial matters, the Rajya Sabha plays a distinctly secondary role. It cannot pass a no confidence motion against the government either, unlike the Lok Sabha.



ELECTIONS IN INDIA



Electronic Voting Machine

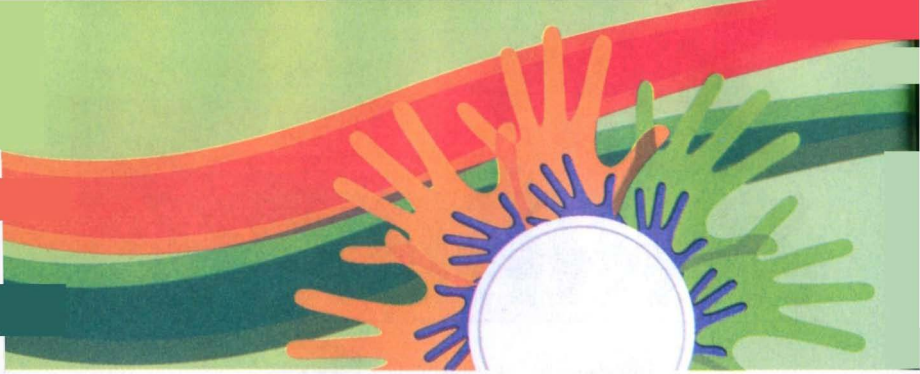
What are the features of Indian elections?

Elections are the expression of democracy in India. They are held regularly, at the local, state, and national levels.

At the national level, elections are held to elect the members of the Lok Sabha, while at the state level, the purpose is to elect representatives to the state assembly. Representatives to local bodies are also elected through local elections.

In India, elections are held in phases, often covering a period of one month, because of the huge population.

The Election Commission of India is responsible for conducting free and fair elections, from the announcement of the date of the election, till the polling and counting. It enforces a 'model code of conduct' that every candidate must follow strictly while campaigning. The election process is concluded when the list of the successful candidates is submitted to the head of the state.



When did India have her first general election?

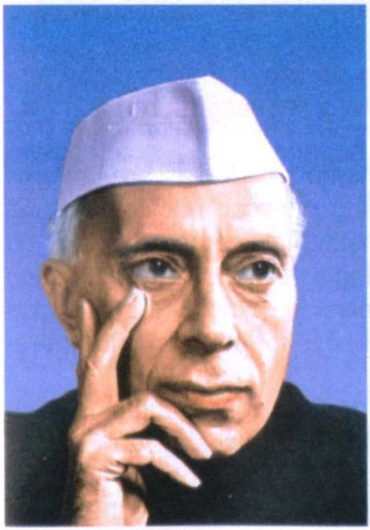
In 1947, India attained her independence. The Constitution of India came into force on January 26th, 1950.

The first general elections under the new constitution were held during the year 1951-52, and the first elected parliament came into being in April, 1952.

These elections were the biggest experiment in democracy anywhere in the world. The elections were held based on universal adult franchise, with all those twenty-one years of age or older, having the right to vote.

There were over 173 million voters, most of them poor, illiterate, and rural, and having had no experience of elections. The big question at the time was how the people would respond to this opportunity.

Organizing these elections was a staggering task. There was a house-to-house survey to register the voters. With over 70 per cent of the voters being illiterate, the candidates



Jawaharlal Nehru

were to be identified by symbols, assigned to each major party, and independent candidates, painted on the ballot-boxes. This was later changed to symbols on the ballot papers.

The voters were to place the ballot papers in the box assigned to a particular candidate, and ballot was secret. Over 224,000 polling booths - one for almost every 1000 voters - were constructed. Nearly 620,000,000 ballot papers were printed, and about a million officials supervised the conduct of the polls.

The Indian National Congress won a landslide victory in the first general elections, winning 364 of the 489 seats, and 45 per cent of the total votes polled. Jawaharlal Nehru became the first democratically elected Prime Minister of India.

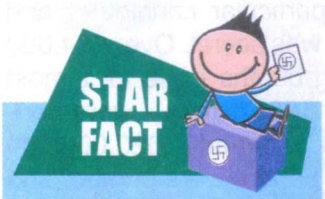
Logo of the Election Commission, India

Why is the job of the Election Commission a challenging one?

Elections in India are events involving political mobilisation and organisational complexity on an amazing scale, and it is the Election Commission of India or ECI, that is responsible for their smooth operation.

The task is mind boggling, since the electorate exceeds 714 million voters and 828,804 polling stations, in locations that vary from the snow-clad mountains of Himalayas, to the deserts of Rajasthan, the mangrove forests of Bengal and the sparsely populated islands in the Indian Ocean.

The ECI has a difficult task to carry out peaceful elections in the regions of violent tensions such as the Naxalite or Maoist-hit regions.



Internet Voting

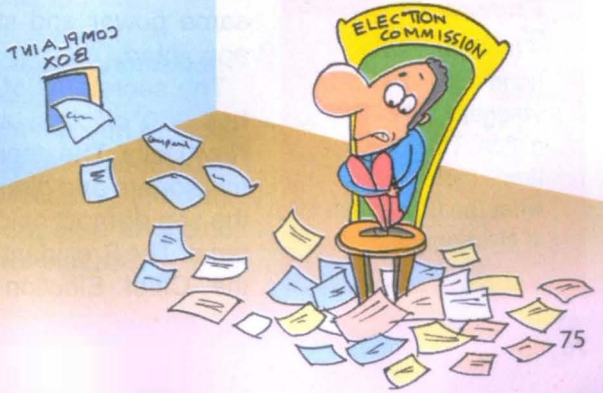
Internet voting was introduced in India for the first time in 2011. The state of Gujarat was the pioneer in this field.

● *Dev Nath*

Nirvachan Sadan - Office of the Election Commission, India

Safety is a major concern in these regions. It also needs to penetrate the innermost regions of the country. Unlike in other countries the voter turnout in India is huge, even in the rural and backward areas. In fact, the ECI set up a polling booth for just one person in the Gir Forest in the 2012 Assembly Elections!

The ECI also has the task of monitoring all the candidates and parties to ensure that no malpractices take place during campaigning, or on the election day. Monitoring thousands of candidates is not an easy job. Yet, the ECI has consistently been able to achieve more than is expected from it.



Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addressing the voters

A Costly Business

The General Elections of 2014 cost a staggering Rs 34.26 billion. This is 20 times more than what the first general election cost!

What is the structure of the Election Commission of India, or ECI?

The ECI was established on 25th January 1950, and is a permanent body, headed by the Chief Election Commissioner, and other commissioners. The Chief Election Commissioner is appointed by the President of India. From 1993, two more election commissioners, who have the same power and status, were also appointed.

The secretariat of the commission has 300 officials, and is located in New Delhi. The deputy election commissioners and director generals are the senior-most officers in the secretariat. The President of India appoints the Chief Election Commissioner,

who serves for six years, and must retire at the age of 65. The commissioner is generally a member of the Civil Services, and more often, of the Indian Administrative Services, or the Indian Revenue Services. He can be removed from his office through the process of impeachment, which needs to be carried out in the parliament. The President of India can remove the other officers

V.S. Sampath, Chief Election Commissioner of India

on the Chief Election Commissioner's recommendation.

The Election Commission of India is considered to be the custodian of free and fair elections, and has proved that it is so, time and time again, election after election.

Election of 1950

In the elections during the 1950s, each candidate had his own ballot box. Different coloured boxes represented the different parties.

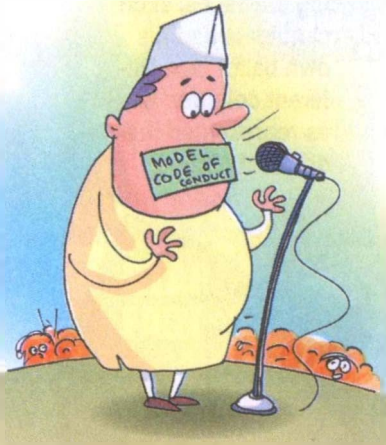
● *Radha Nair*

Why is the 'Model Code of Conduct' important in an election?

During elections in India, the Election Commission issues a 'Model Code of Conduct'. It consists of guidelines for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections mainly with respect to speeches, polling day, polling booths, election manifestos, processions and general behaviour.

For example, politicians should not make hate speeches, pitting one community against another, or make promises about new projects that may sway a voter.

The 'Model Code of Conduct' comes into force immediately on announcement of the election schedule by the commission, and is strictly enforced. It remains in force till the end of the electoral process, and is the key to ensuring free and fair elections in the country.



An election campaign

Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, during an election campaign

The 'Model Code of Conduct' is designed to provide a playing field for all political parties, keep the campaign fair and healthy, avoid clashes and conflicts between parties, and ensure peace and order. It aims to ensure that the ruling party, either at the centre or in the states, does not misuse its official position to gain an unfair advantage in an election.

This instrument is a major contribution of Indian electoral system to the cause of democracy.

What are the major steps in the election process till the polling takes place?

The Election Commission first announces the dates of nomination, polling, and counting. Once this announcement is made, the 'Model Code of Conduct' comes into force. The various political parties and political alliances declare suitable candidates for various seats. Government funds and government machinery cannot be used for campaigning. Campaigning by the candidates has to stop 48 hours before the polling day.

On election day, voters have to go to their polling stations which are usually government schools

Women voters queue up to cast their votes

and institutions. Government employees man the polling stations, and the District Collector is in overall charge. Nowadays, voters cast their votes via electronic voting machines, and this greatly reduces the chances of election fraud. An indelible ink is applied usually on the left index finger of the voter to show that the voter has cast his or her vote.

Polling day is generally declared a holiday, so that all voters can cast their respective votes. There is a rule that if any institute is not declaring holiday, it must make special arrangements for its workers to cast their votes. At 5 pm sharp, the officials from Election Commission seal the electronic voting machines in the presence of the representatives of respective political parties. After this, all the machines are packed off and sent under high security and vigil to the office of the Election Commission where they are guarded until counting begins.

Popular EVMs

Indian manufactured EVMs have proved very popular abroad too. Nepal, Bhutan, Namibia, and Kenya are just some of the nations that are already bought them from India.

Why is the Indian system of voting a modern one?

In many parts of the world, voting is done by making a tick mark against the name of one's preferred candidate that appears on a list of candidates printed on a ballot paper.

India has moved beyond this system. Since 1999, ballot papers have been replaced by EVMs, or Electronic Voting Machines in Indian elections.

The EVMs were commissioned in 1989 by the Election Commission of India in collaboration with Electronics Corporation of India Limited, Hyderabad and Bharat Electronics Ltd.

The first one was designed in 1980 by M.B. Haneefa, and used in a limited number of polling stations in the by-election held in Kerala for the North Paravur assembly seat.

EVMs have the great advantage of making counting faster, and also reducing fraud in elections. The Indian voter has proved his modern mindset by using them properly.

Voting Machine

What is a 'none of the above' vote?

The Indian voter has an option of choosing from a list of candidates.

However, if none of the candidates is to his liking, he has another option too. He can tick against a box titled 'none of the above.' This is called a 'none of the above,' or NOTA vote.

This option was first suggested by the Election Commission in 2009, and first implemented during the by-elections held in 2013. In the recently held 2014 general elections, many voters chose to exercise their NOTA option.

However, in the event that the maximum number of votes are for the NOTA option, the candidate with the greatest number of votes still gets elected. The election is neither cancelled, nor is there a re-election.

Voting Machine

What happens after the polling day in India?

Even when polling is over, the work of the Election Commission continues. Because of India's vastness, polling cannot be done on the same day everywhere, but must be conducted in multiple phases. This means that the EVMs from places where polling is over must be collected, and stored under heavy security to prevent anyone tampering with them.

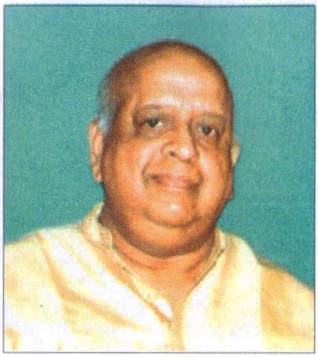
Once all the phases of voting are over, the counting is done on a day that has been announced in advance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi soon after his Victory

by the Election Commission. The votes from all the polling booths are tallied on the same day, and the results are announced immediately.

In every constituency, the candidate with the most votes is declared the winner, and a list of winning candidates is drawn up to be submitted to the President. The party or coalition of parties that gets the most number of seats is invited by the President to form the new government.

What was the role played by T. N. Seshan in the Election Commission of India?



T. N. Seshan

T.N. Seshan has left his mark on the election process in India, as one of the most powerful Election Commissioners to hold this post. His appointment as the tenth Chief Election Commissioner in 1991 was the beginning of a new chapter in the history of India's parliamentary democracy. He not only reinvigorated the Election Commission, but was also largely successful in curbing electoral malpractices in the country.

Seshan cancelled, or ordered repolling in those areas where irregularities were reported, and took strict action against those who were found guilty of dereliction of duty. He deployed paramilitary forces in sensitive areas, and implemented the Election Commission's 'Model Code of Conduct' seriously.

Seshan reviewed more than forty thousand alleged cases, and disqualified fourteen thousand potential candidates for public office.

By the time he left office in December 1996, T.N. Seshan had set very high standards for his successors to this august office.

ADVANTAGES OF DEMOCRACY

Why is democracy the best form of government for India?

Democracy is the best form of government for India for several reasons. It puts power into the hands of each citizen through his or her right to vote.

If a political party fails to deliver, the citizens can vote it out of power- and the same is true of individual candidates, too. Democracy prevents a concentration of power because every ruling party, and every representative has to face elections every five years.

This imparts a sense of responsibility to the party in power, and the knowledge that they can be thrown out in the next election if they don't perform well keeps representatives on their toes. The citizens too, become more vigilant in a democracy, for they feel that they have a role to play in their future, and the future of their nation.

Why does representative democracy offer stability in administration?

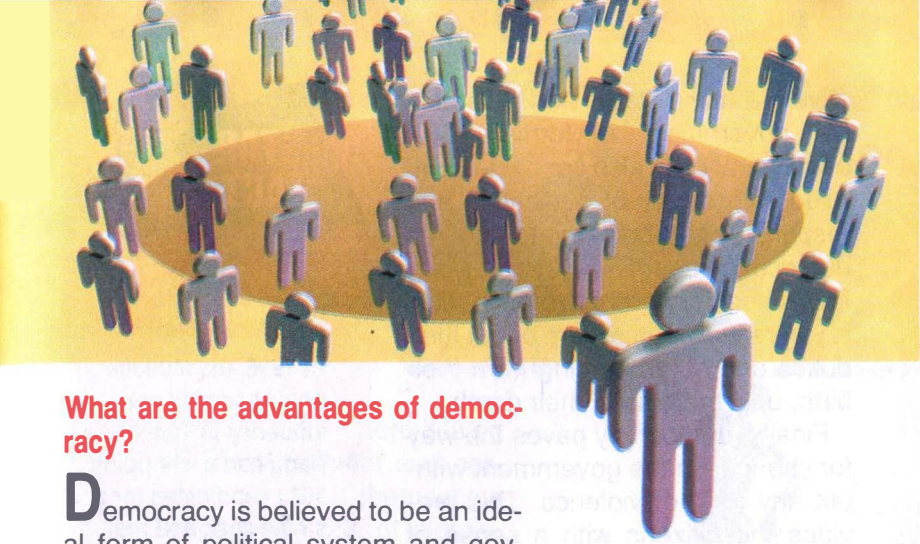
In a representative democracy, the tenure of the government and the representatives is fixed. This gives stability to the administration.

Moreover, decisions are not taken on the spur of the moment, or by one person. Any law that is presented is discussed thoroughly by the representatives of the people before being passed, and all decisions taken are also discussed by the cabinet of ministers.

This is very different from monarchies or dictatorships, where the whim of one person, or a small group of people determines the fate of a nation.

This is why revolutions and rebellions are common against monarchs and dictators, while democratic governments are generally stable.

Voters' queue in a polling station



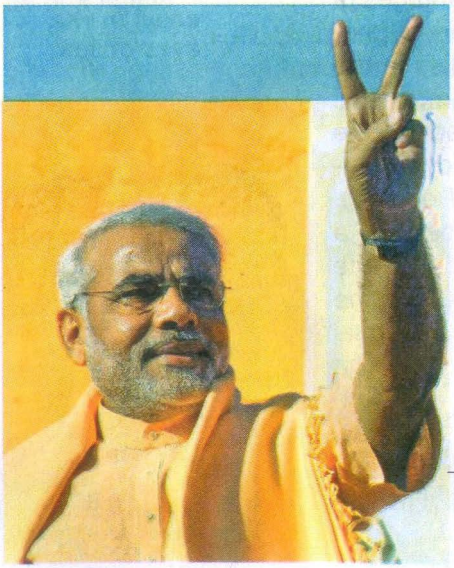
What are the advantages of democracy?

Democracy is believed to be an ideal form of political system and government, and this is why many countries in the world have opted for it. One of the foremost advantages of democracy is the protection of people's interest. Real power lies in the people who exercise it by means of representatives duly elected by the citizen. Moreover, democracy is generally based on the rule of equality. This means that all members of a country or a state are equal in the eyes of law. Every individual has the right to enjoy and experience equal economic, political, and social rights. The state is not allowed to discriminate citizens on the basis of sex, caste, property, and religion.

Democracy is recognized for its efficiency, firmness and stability. When there are fixed and elected represent-

atives, a more stable and responsible government is formed. The administration is also conducted and ruled with sense of dedication and responsibility. According to experts, democracy seems to be the very first school for good citizenship. This is where individuals learn about their duties and rights starting from their birth, until the time of their death.

Finally, democracy paves the way for changes in the government without any form of violence. This provides the citizens with a sense of involvement and participation while promoting peace and progress.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows the victory sign.

Maximum Candidates

In 1996, the Modaurichi assembly constituency in Tamil Nadu had a whopping 1033 candidates for a single seat, and the ballot paper was not a paper at all, but a booklet!

What are the disadvantages of democracy?

Democracy is the rule by the majority, so one of its disadvantages is the fear that the views and interests of minorities may be overlooked. Moreover, the majority may not always be right -for the mass of the peo-

ple are easily swayed. There is also the danger that inefficient and corrupt people can get themselves elected, through the use of money, muscle power, or emotional appeal. This can lead to a corrupt government.

Administration may become slow and inefficient in a democracy, because the decision making involves so many people. It can also lead to wasted resources and time, because of long processes that involve the making of laws, and the huge amount of money that are spent during elections.

Moreover, not all individuals under a democratic country are aware of political and social circumstances in their country. Some of them are not even acquainted with political issues. This may lead to erroneous decisions, and the election of candidates who do not have the welfare of the nation at heart.

Why do some people oppose democracy in India?

Though India is the world's largest democracy, some people feel that it is not the best form of government for India. One reason they give is that in India many people are illiterate, while many others live below the poverty line. It is felt that these sections of the population may not be aware of what is in the best interests of the nation, and their votes may either go to totally unsuitable, or to unscrupulous candidates.

Very often, leaders of political parties in India are chosen based on caste, creed, and other such factors that appeal to the poor population. The government thus formed may work for its own welfare, and not nation building, therefore giving a freehand to corrupt practices in politics and bureaucracy. With various parties having stronghold in various regions, coalition governments are often formed and this has been a deterrent to a lot of progressive steps.

However, the fact remains that India is the largest democracy, and will remain so for a long time to come. If the political system focuses on getting votes by delivering in development, India has the talent to become the next super power in the world.

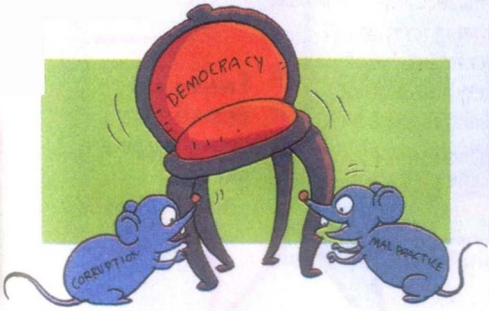
What are the threats to democracy in India?

In India, democracy is alive and well, yet we should all be aware of some of the threats that it faces.

One of the biggest of these is corruption, which has been rampant in the past. Corruption must be checked, or it will affect the strength of our democracy.

Another major worry is communalism. In a land of many religions and creeds, communalism has no place, and must be replaced by tolerance if progress is to be made. Lack of education amongst the poorer sections of the population are other issues that must be overcome in the interests of democracy.

Increasing militarism will take the country backward. Only if these steps are taken, and Indian society, as well as every Indian citizen, upholds the basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in the social environment and individual behavior, can we honestly say that India is a democracy, in the real sense of the word.



QUOTES ON DEMOCRACY

The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.
- Winston Churchill

Democracy is when the indigent, and not the men of property, are the rulers.
- Aristotle

The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of heart.
- Mahatma Gandhi

No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent.
- Abraham Lincoln

Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few.
- George Bernard Shaw

Democracy is the road to socialism.
- Karl Marx

Democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people.
- Oscar Wilde

Let the people think they govern and they will be governed.
- William Penn

Democracy is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike.
- Plato

Freedom and democracy are dreams you never give up.
- Aung San Suu Kyi

TIMELINE

507-321 BC - Ancient Athens adopts a form of democracy.

1215 - Signing of Magna Carta.

1300 - Assemblies called by Edward 1 grow into the English Parliament.

1688 - The glorious revolution in England and Wales.

1776 - Declaration of Independence in the USA.

1788 - Adoption of the US constitution.

1789 - French Revolution started.

1832 - First Parliamentary Reform Act in the UK gives vote to small landowners and some farmers.

1856 - Australia introduces secret ballot.

1893 - New Zealand becomes the first country to give women the vote.

1906 - Finland becomes the first European country to give women the vote.

1917 - Russian Revolution.

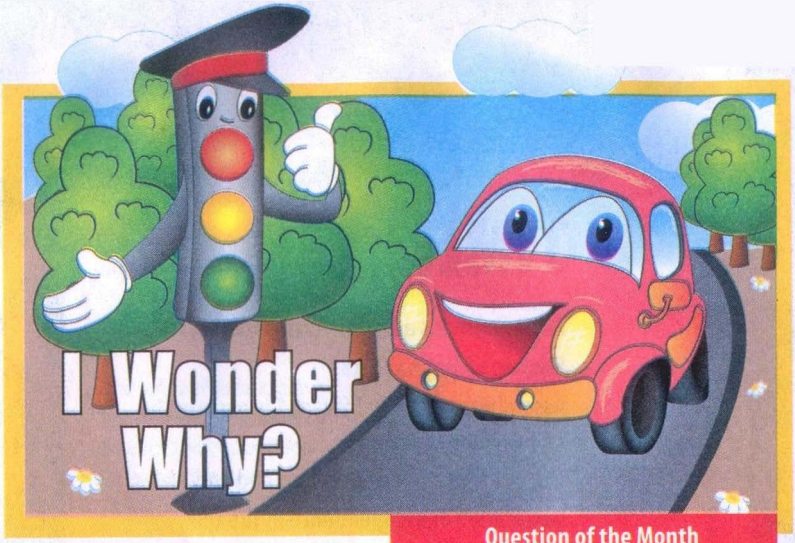
1947 - India gained independence.

1950 - India became a democratic republic.

1951 - 52 - First general elections in India.

1957 - 65 - Civil Rights Movement in the USA. It demands equal rights for African Americans.

1994 - African National Congress wins first democratic elections in South Africa.



Question of the Month

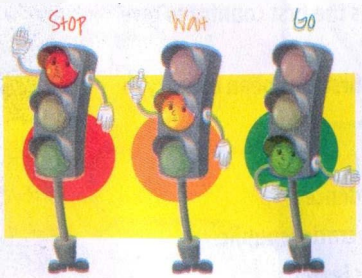
Why is red light used at the traffic signal for stopping the vehicles?

There are two reasons for the 'STOP' signal being in red.

One reason is that red is a colour that can be seen even from a distance. Of all the colours, red has the maximum visibility because of its greater wavelength.

Secondly, the colour 'red' has always been associated with danger, probably because it is the colour of blood. So a red light at the traffic signal warns the driver, to stop. And he can see it long before he reaches the spot!

● *Indhu Thomas*



Question sent by:
Rubina Singh, Patiala.

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GK CONTEST-16 WINNERS

Winners of the GK Contest - 16, NOBEL LAUREATES- held in the September issue of Tell Me Why.

1. Prakash Mishra
VIII- Chhotaki Sarimpur, Buxar, Bihar.

2. Nameera Ahmad
Darul Salma, 4/1179-C, New Sir Syed Nagar, Aligarh, U.P.

3. Gandhi Kumar Shaw
Narsingh Bandh, Near Ambedkar Colony, Burnpur, Burdwan,W.B.

4. Siddharth Singh
Flat No: 714, Phase 1,
Vijaya Gardens, Baridih,
Jamshedpur, Jharkhand.

5. Michael V. Binoj
Std IV A, Christhuraja Public School, Chunkappara,
Pathanamthitta, Kerala.

GK Contest -16 NOBEL LAUREATES - ANSWERS

1. Rabindra Nath Tagore 2. C.V. Raman
3. Dr. Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar 4. Mother Teresa
5. Amartya Sen

ANIMALS

Here's a contest for our readers.
Identify the **ANIMALS**, from the photos given here.

All you need to do is send us an email naming each one with the proper number.

(PLEASE GIVE YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS ALSO IN THE E-MAIL)
You are also welcome to send your answers by post.

Five winners will be awarded prizes.
In case there are more than five correct entries, the winners will be chosen by lot.

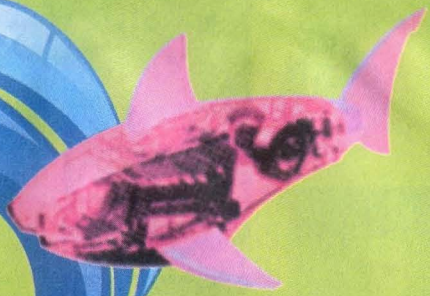
Last Date to receive entries:
2014 NOVEMBER 25

Our e-mail address:
childrensdivision@mmp.in

Please enter
TMW - GK CONTEST - 18
in the subject line of your email.

FOR FIVE
LUCKY WINNERS

MICRO ROBOT



If you are sending your entry by post, superscribe this on your envelope.

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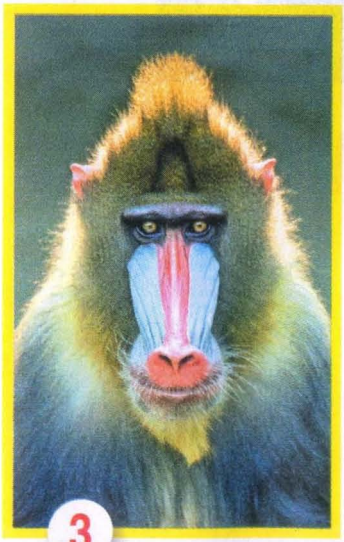
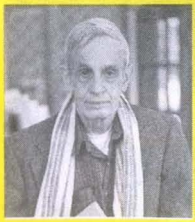
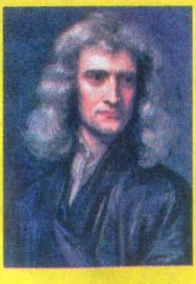


NEXT ISSUE

GREAT MATHEMATICIANS





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